



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





1758



•



100-443887-100

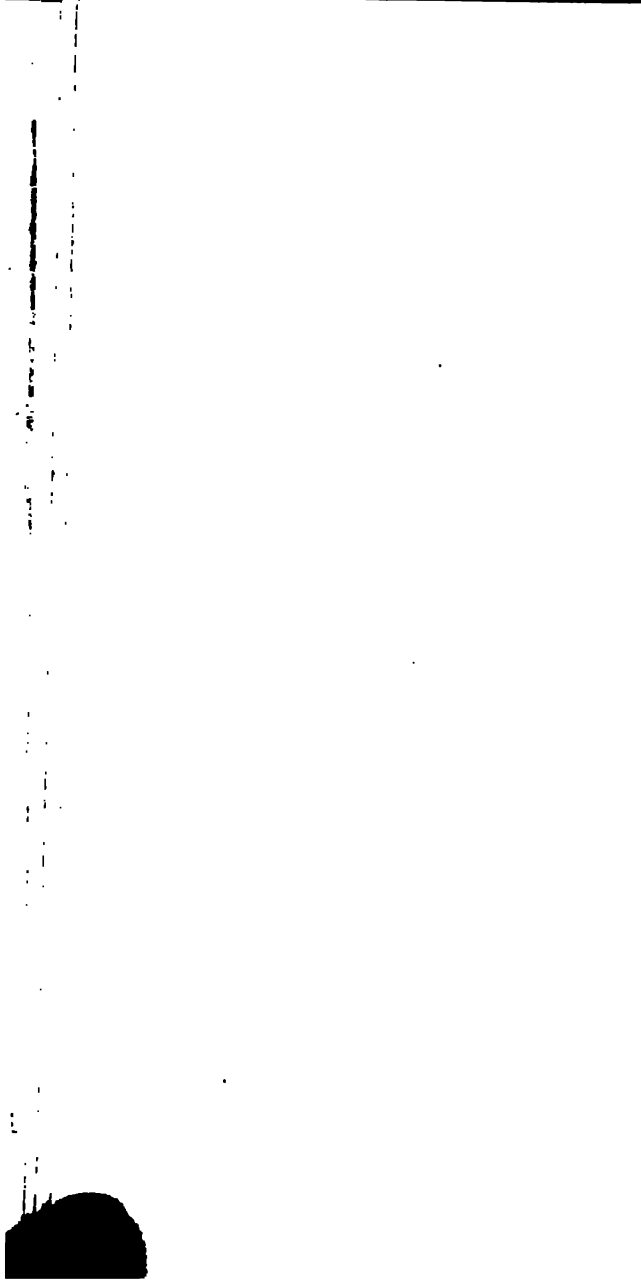
7





CHILDREN OF HOPE





PROPERTY
OF THE
NEW YORK
SOCIETY LIBRARY



CHILDREN OF HC

A NOVEL

BY

STEPHEN WHITMAN

AUTHOR OF "PREDESTINED," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

F. R. GRUGER



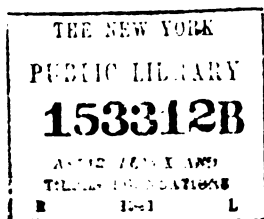
LC

NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.

1916

GO

what?"



Copyright, 1915, 1916, by
STEPHEN WHITMAN

All rights reserved

200.12
1937

CONTENTS

CHAPTER

- I THE POSTMAN BLOWS HIS WHISTLE IN MAPLE
- II A SHIP OF DREAMS SETS FORTH INTO UNKNOV
- III HENCEFORTH THALIA WILL LIVE ONLY FOR HEI
- IV THE FATES LEAD THE GRACES TO THE PENSION S
DORF
- V THERE'S NOTHING LIKE BRASS BUTTONS, AFTER
- VI A TOUCH OF THE SUN IN VIA TORNABUONI . .
- VII THE LAST CHAIR IS FILLED: THE CIRCLE IS COM
- VIII AGLAIA FINDS THAT WILL POWER CANNOT DO
THING
- IX FOR BETTER FOR WORSE, FOR RICHER FOR POOR
- X A JUST MAN JUDGES NOT ONLY THE OFFENDI
HIMSELF
- XI THALLIE DONS THE PRETTIEST GOWN THAT S
EVER WORN
- XII AN OLD GATE-KEEPER IN A RÔLE OF GREAT IMPO
- XIII JOHN HOLLAND BRINGS HIS WORK IN FLORENC
CLOSE
- XIV CAMILLO WINS THE HIGHEST OF ALL MILITARY E
- XV A SCENT OF DYING FLOWERS, MELTING WAX, AN
- XVI A HEART INHABITED BY PURE MEMORIES IS NOT
GER
- XVII THALLIE MAKES A DISCOVERY THAT TAKES HER
AWAY
- XVIII FAREWELL, GOLDEN CITY, RICH WITH SO MANY
AND JOYS
- XIX FROSSIE FINDS THAT IT IS NOT UNPLEASANT TO I
- XX THE MARBLE FACE OF DEMETER SMILES IN THI
LIGHT
- XXI AUREL





LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- "Good old Nature! She sets the stage rather well to-night,
what?" *F*
- "Though he left his clown's suit at home, who would know
the difference?"
- "See, I've taken your advice! I've stopped my lessons up
there!"
- "Impossible to-night, my little prince. The park is shut"
- "No, no, no, no, no, no! You are one of zose American
meelionaires!"
- There it lay below them, the golden city surrounded by its
golden hills





CHILDREN OF HOPE

CHILDREN OF HOPE

CHAPTER ONE

THE POSTMAN BLOWS HIS WHISTLE IN MAPLE LANE

NEAR the northern border-line of Ohio, on the outskirts of a manufacturing town called Zeniasville, there stood in Maple Lane, midway of a garden bounded by a broken picket-fence, a small, yellowish frame-house two stories high, the shingles slipping from its roof, the slats of its shutters tilted at all angles, and alongside the front door, close to the bell-knob of white china, a sign-board, askew, dilapidated, inscribed:

Aurelius Goodchild, Esquire,
Interviews by Appointment.

Every fine morning there emerged upon the doorstep a tall, lean man of fifty-five, with bushy beard and mustaches in which gray hair was mingling with fiery red. He was aquiline, pallid, hollow of eye and cheek. Veins, full and blue, wandered over his temples and down the middle of his high forehead. From beneath shaggy brows he gazed forth with a mien half wistful and half sanguine.

If the day proved mild, he retained in hand his black felt hat. A breeze lifted from his neck locks well-nigh poetically long and ragged. In his buttonhole was a flower.

He inhaled the morning air with gusto, tried to square his shoulders, set out for a promenade. Now and then he

CHILDREN OF HOPE

bony cane that lacked a ferrule. This relic
sunshine like a sword-blade; but the dogs
ootpath on that account.

ing gate-posts, beneath the foliage of out-
s, he was prone to stop for a chat with tod-
girls. To these he imparted rigmaroles which

but which they could not remember after-
towed on a sickly one the blossom from his
h an appropriate, fantastic tale that made
moment something precious. Parting from
apology that business called him, he bow
ion to the smallest girl.

home, however, he decided that he sti

untered down the lane, a quiet thorou

of maple trees, rude gutters made of

dirt roadbed cut into ruts by the w

ad passed the week before. Inspe

; to a robin, pausing to sniff a lil

at his own gate. Stock-still, he r

with a look of vague regret, as if

at some day he would mend it.

e front door was opened for

row staircase, a patch of wal'

ts. In that small dwelling

uffles than of feathers in a

g a widower, possessed

number believed by the a

ious, the number, indeed

ughters, so celebrated for t

ement! Of those person

ed, in a mildewed steel-

as mortal hand could

hem. Clad in elegant drapery,— of which certain less reverent artists have deprived them,— performing in unison some celestial sort of calisthenics, they looked fixedly over their shoulders at Aurelius Goodchild all the while that he was dressing and undressing. For a time he failed to read that threefold gaze; but finally — his youngest was already eight months old — he understood. He renamed his daughters after the three Graces.

Aglaia, nowadays, was close to thirty.

A pale blonde, she wore tresses of the faintest copperish color. Slender, dainty, serene, she showed thin lips, and eyes like emeralds that smoldered under blanched lashes often lowered. From the scanty dressmaking materials at her disposal she devised costumes for herself suggestive of the pictures in French fashion journals. Aglaia it was who met bill-collectors at the door.

Euphrosyne was twenty-five.

Beneath hair that resembled her father's in its vivid red she displayed what is often called, in young women of somewhat heavy features, a strong face. Already her figure foreshadowed a matronly solidity. Attire that was softened and prim confessed her tastes. Of mornings, with a wicker basket on her arm, Frossie went to market.

Thalia had just turned twenty.

Her skin was of that brilliancy and fineness which accords with the richest shade of auburn curls. She had lips that were ripe and scarlet, large sky-blue eyes, and rounder milk-white throat a double crease, Nature's own precious necklace. Her shape was at the same time plump and svelte. Not infrequently her dress fell open at the neck, her hair threatened to escape its pins, her bodice lacked some buttons down the back. Thallie was the one who decorated Mr. Goodchild's coat-lapel with flowers. At such moments now she reminded him of her mother!

It was no more than three decades since his wife, she the pretty daughter of a village son of an intemperate physician. Poor, a threadbare *Romeo*, spouting poetry and moonlight beneath the window of a serf had furnished that note of mystery on which thrives best. She, after braving her family bed to pine away, recovering to devise clarity had ended by eloping with him.

Old Outwall never forgave his daughter's liaison.

But those two, for the most part living ideals, undismayed to find themselves parents to children, ever watching a radiant mind. Goodchild's talents were some day going to love prisoner in their cottage till the end had passed since her death, but there was which he did not think of her. At the inception project for renown and wealth, Aurelius and she might share in its fruition!" For it seemed in doubt, so confidently did he still mirage.

Often changing occupations, he had each return to disillusion, equipped for the practice of a new industry. A youthful destined to revolutionize the art of the possible for him, in middle age, to fall back on photography. From another flight the the knack of rubbing up carbon-portraits pen-and-ink drawings suitable for advancing the likenesses of neighbors' brats in over his inventions,—all patented, and imitation as from use,—he had not literature without first learning how to

letter to a creditor, or drawn off from the field of music before understanding how to tune pianofortes.

As for the sciences, he knew enough about medicine to work apparent miracles, in one way or the other, on ailing live stock; in the province of chemistry could contrive amazing odors and explosions; concerning botany was not to be confused about the classic history of any vegetable, just as, when physics was the topic, he had two reasons, one modern and one mythological, for nearly every natural phenomenon.

In short, there seemed to be no end to the smatterings acquired by Aurelius from books that no one else would think worth looking at, perused in a broken armchair or a raveled hammock between spasms of exertion.

Such a father was bound to be, at least in the nursery, a successful man, adept at the invention of enchanting games, weird tales, mysterious feats in sleight of hand, nonsensical ballads without end.

A wonderland, that house, for children!

In the dark cellar, redolent of earth and whitewash, the one dragon that King Arthur's knights had not run down kept guard, in gratitude for his asylum, over rows of jelly-glasses, crocks full of pickles, and the potato-bin. Beneath the rafters, at that time of year when the more fashionable birds were planning journeys south, nightly the Little People gathered — each lighted by a glow-worm dangling from a grass-blade — to bargain with the spiders for their new-spun fabrics of a winter weight.

Then, in the garden, at twilight, if one laid ear against the tree-trunks, maybe a stirring was to be heard within the bark, as a small hamadryad nestled down to sleep. Or a laurel-shrub emitting a faint, musical sigh, all debated in hushed accents whether this might not be the very evergreen into which Apollo, that sublime musician, once transformed

himself. Or else, did one look up, high in the night Mahomet's angels were casting down firebrands to keep bad spirits from the gates of Paradise. Or perhaps, in the direction of Mount Latmos, the fair moon, Selene, left Endymion slumbering and climbed reluctantly into the heavens again.

Moreover, on calm summer evenings one heard the swallows, while rushing off to their concerts, practising their trills, and the katydids' string-band scraping fugues on their fiddles, and, far off, the bullfrogs at their oratorios.

Indeed, those children, predisposed to the "artistic temperament," soon learned unconsciously something of counterpoint from scratching insects, of a sense of color from the intermelting hues that decked a butterfly, of the literary and dramatic unities from the inevitable harmony of all natural vistas. At every stage of their development all three were old for their age.

To educate them was easier than to dress and feed them.

Sometimes the whole family was galvanized by affluence: there was money in the house! Without delay, new shoes creaked on small feet; white stockings appeared every afternoon in Maple Lane; Mr. Goodchild strode homeward with some brand-new books, while from the open windows was wafted, at the same time with a thin clatter of Tschaikovsky waltzes, an aroma of fried chickens. Dinner over, the father, expanding on the door-step, gazed toward the farthest tree-tops with the look of a veteran conqueror about to subjugate fresh lands. He recalled the time when his house had lain in an independent village, not in a suburb of that black leviathan whose sooty exhalations every year filled wider skies. Some day he would wake to find his garden in the heart of Zenasville: his property would bring a pretty penny! It needed one thing only, the certain expansion of the town. With that understood, the ground he stood

on was as good as worth a fabulous sum. One could call it the same thing as being a rich man!

Or else, the cash on hand had all been spent.

Then presently one saw again in use old costumes that had been flung aside. Then one smelled another sort of cookery. Then one perceived at night, on an illuminated window-pane, a long silhouette, an aquiline profile, which passed and repassed till dawn.

Again—in those days when his daughters were too young to exercise much culinary judgment—perhaps he stopped in the midst of preparing a slim meal, girt in a checkered apron, a fork half raised, to cry, with glowing eyes, “Eureka!” Fortune was in his grasp at last: he had once more invented something!

And the house resounded with songs, scamperings, and squeals of laughter.

So Aglaia, Euphrosyne, and Thalia grew up in a region of fine dreams and crestfallen wakings, of feasts and famines, or, as they themselves put it, of chickens one day and feathers the next.

For in girlhood, emerging finally from the period of blind confidence and fond beliefs, they began to appreciate the actual world. And just as the old house, while they grew larger, seemed ever smaller, and turned the shabbier the daintier they became, so, when their hearts expanded with a thousand natural instincts, each found herself constricted by the ramshackle home, like a captive bird in spring, all at once made aware of the limitations of its cage. Thenceforth affection for their father did not prevent the secret thought that release would come to them only through their own efforts.

Marriage was the first idea of each. From that neighborhood, however, most marriageable young men, as soon as capable of serious intentions, set out for the great cities.

The girls, their childhood love-affairs all ended in lame partings, fell back upon the arts. Aglaia, recalling Adelina Patti's triumphs, dreamed of the opera. Euphrosyne, with George Eliot in mind, took up the pen. The career of Rosa Bonheur urged Thalia to the easel.

But the scores of "Faust" and "Lucia di Lammermoor" fell to pieces; the writing-table showed across its edge two patches bare of varnish; even the easel was taking on a battered look, and still their lives were bounded by the broken picket-fence.

Its dilapidation was masked at intervals by honey-suckle. Between its pickets one saw an old-fashioned garden.

The same flowers still bloomed there yearly, each species in its season. There appeared the antiquated tints of scarlet-sage, of pink geraniums, of purple fox-glove. There shone the colors, like a chromatic lexicon of love, of many roses — moss-roses, exquisitely immature, blush-roses, suggestive of a young cheek kissed for the first time, double-damask roses, of a flaming tincture, and over all the rest the white rose, blanching at mid-day in the full fervor of the sun. There fuchsias and begonias and bleeding-heart, monk's-hood and London-pride and prince's-feather, called to mind the time when crinoline had brushed such garden-plats, and fingers ornamented with intaglio rings had plucked such blossoms. And mourning-brides displayed their subtle purple, too, and marigolds their dusky yellow, and corn-flowers their honest blue. Nor were the poppies lacking. Pink, white and scarlet, glossy and diaphanous, they were more marvelous than all the rest, when sunshine pierced and seemed almost to have dissolved their petals.

But alas! when one leaned across the fence to look more closely, mildew was seen to be invading the moss-roses; the sweet-william was suffering from an unchecked blight; bugs had riddled the pansies, while if timothy was intruding

on the dahlias, wild daisies were well mingled with the peonies. Indeed, one felt that whatever springtime enthusiasm had impelled the planting of those flowers, good fortune more than care preserved them. Throughout that house, everything once started had to shift for itself till its dilapidation.

The small rooms were pervaded with an old-fashioned, semi-rural atmosphere. This was partly due to the countless odds and ends which meanly reconstructed there a period of naïve and tawdry household furniture. Then, too, when doors and windows had been kept shut awhile, all the faded carpets, tidies, sofas, lambrequins exhaled the odors of a dead age. It was one of those little old houses, threadbare and unesthetic, the shortcomings of which are finally appreciated, and yet, because of poverty, not remedied.

Nevertheless, there was a different savor and appearance to a low, haphazard-looking extension, its walls nearly plumb, its windows almost rectilinear, that extended from the kitchen porch to the rear fence. This structure, the product of Mr. Goodchild's own architectural skill, was called the studio.

Immediately on passing from the kitchen porch into a narrow corridor, one smelled chemicals, oil-paints, fresh flowers. Ahead there opened out a large, bright room, the board walls plastered with sketches and mechanical diagrams. Between windows full of potted plants stood home-made book-shelves and cabinets for curiosities. To the left, a door opened into a closet, by turns the "dark-room" and the "laboratory." To the right there huddled a photographer's camera, a few backgrounds painted in gouache with elegiac landscapes, a chair with an iron head-rest, some mats of artificial grass, a flower-stand for brides to pose by. In the far wall, a north light, composed of

several small window-panes, expanded above an easel, a writing-table, an old pianoforte. Here it was that Aglaia ran her scales, that Euphrosyne thumbed the dictionary, that Thalia laid out her palette, that Mr. Goodchild carried forward his innumerable projects.

The studio was the heart of the house.

Through the long days of summer, the three girls worked there peacefully. Soft airs, which had gathered fragrance from many blossoms, entered, to be perfumed afresh, above the window plants. The stillness of that suburb ringed the sisters round: at times some sound — a calling voice, the barking of a dog, a cracking whip — penetrated their consciousness, but very gently. The sunshine, creeping across the floor, at last turned red: the window geraniums were nearly matched in hue by the still clouds beyond them. Languor pervaded nature, foliage stood motionless, the earth's heart-beat was imperceptible. Thallie laid down her brush to dream. Aggie, putting aside her scores, sat balancing assets against liabilities. Frossie, having refilled and cleaned her fountain-pen, turned her thoughts kitchenward. The tardy shadows found them gone.

But the studio was coziest in winter.

Then, to be sure, the flower-pots looked forlorn. Against the panes hung icicles. Through the north light one saw, beneath clouds of violent contour, the bare limbs of trees, their forks wedged with snow, all swaying to the blast. In such weather, though, the fat cast-iron stove wore round its middle a red-hot zone, and the early dusk, if shortening the day, extended the period which charmed that household most, the lamplight hour. Snug in their little corner, listening, though well warmed, with a shivery delight to wind and sleet, they felt their more subtle aspirations, if not benumbed by cold, at least stupefied by that hot confinement. The present, more than the future, then engrossed the sisters.

Spring, on the other hand, made the studio, and all the world, seem different.

When the sky, on a day unexpectedly serene, revealed unusual tenderness, when one discovered that the mesh of twigs had here and there caught fast a scrap of green, when suddenly the first song-bird warbled, straightway prosaic thoughts were beautifully transformed, while all fantastic dreams turned reasonable once more.

Again the sisters glimpsed that future which the sum of all their tasks ought finally to earn for them. To one appeared a proscenium that framed a multitude of applauding strangers; to another, a salon maintained by intellectual celebrities; to the third, great galleries wherein the throng stood longest before her pictures. Then their father entered softly, in his shiny house-jacket and blue carpet slippers, to inform them, with a sprightly air, that he had brought home four fine pork chops for supper.

Over the supper-table hung a porcelain lamp, its shade and bowl embellished with hand-painted daisies. In the center of the pink-fringed cloth a cruet-stand displayed its thick glass vessels and its old, conventional lions' heads bereft of silver-plating. Round this object clustered many dishes of jam, pickles, and spiced fruit. Before the father, on a platter of imitation delf, smoked the viands of the day. The vegetable-bowls were passed from hand to hand.

At these repasts the girls turned talkative and gay: all chattered at once, all burst together into peals of laughter. Mr. Goodchild, plying his fork excitedly, chewing hard, so as to clear his mouth for speech, was a worthy master of the symposium, in which anything was apt to be discussed, from archaic Apollos to woolen undergarments, from medieval ladies' fashions to the habits of bees. His beard, in the lamplight, was like a tangle of gold and silver threads; his eyes shone in their hollow sockets; his full, white brow,

almost transparent at the temples, seemed encircled by a shadowy garland. It was a prefiguration from the hand-painted daisies on the lamp.

Sometimes, while admiring his daughters in that mellow radiance, he determined to whisk them off, on making his fortune, to scenes worthier of them. Then once more Aurelius would hurl defiance at the future. And the sisters, the gaiety fading from their faces, would listen with fixed smiles, with feelings of compassion and self-pity.

Now he had in mind a new invention, to be composed somehow of tubes, mirrors, and electric lights, by aid of which one was to see from any room the visitor on the doorstep.

"A thing like that, a universal convenience, must be financed in a big way, by some well-known banker with facilities for arranging large issues of gilt-edged bonds. To put it through I may even have to run down to New York."

Only for a moment did he falter at thought of entering that famous maelstrom, that traditional center of all pandemoniums, which one so easily pictured as composed entirely of Wall Street, Broadway, and Fifth Avenue — of effete arbiters of fashion, fair sirens of the footlights, and haughty plutocrats.

"But once I get into their offices they're bound to see the value of this proposition. After all, I shall only have to say, 'Mr. Morgan, if you'll permit me to rig my tubes from your desk to your front door!'"

Then, musing:

"Those great captains of finance — where do they get that knack of money-making? According to Chaldean astrology the Moon in the Second House signifies success in life and the acquisition of riches. But after all, such theories are absurd! In my own horoscope I have Saturn in the Second House, which would seem always to threaten

trouble and worry in financial matters. And yet I intend to be rich — not for the dollars, my dears, but to give you the finest possible advantages."

"You forget, Dad," said Euphrosyne, in her level voice, "that your nativity also shows the Sun in trine with Jupiter, which promises you a great alteration to wealth and good fortune."

His eyes were instantly lighted up again.

"That's so! And this new machine, the Goodchild Tel-exenoscope — the Long-distance-guest-sighter — will be the means of bringing it about at last!"

But Aglaia, her emerald-green eyes staring into space, remarked:

"How much do you really suppose old Jabez Outwall's worth these days?"

Aurelius repressed a look of pain. Thalia's pout expressed ennui. Euphrosyne, with a mirthless laugh, inquired:

"Chasing that will-o'-the-wisp again?"

Jabez Outwall was an uncle of their mother's, a retired lumber merchant of Detroit, now eighty-odd years old. Reputed to be wealthy, he had for a long time furnished the sisters with a secret hope. But, as the years went by without a sign from him, two had concluded that the Outwalls' animosity against Aurelius still smoldered on in Jabez. Only Aglaia, reflecting that the near approach of death may change the hardest hearts, clung to the dream of a fine legacy.

Mr. Goodchild said in low tones:

"I'm glad that I never expected anything of Uncle Jabez. If I had, on one of those specially dark days I might have wished for a human being's death. When our Lord, in His Sermon on the Mount, described one sin that may be committed no less in thought than in act, He suggested another

haps, since I have failed to find it elsewhere, it was there — I might have become a Mansfield or an Irving!”

Mrs. Inchkin encouraged him in that belief.

“O, Mr. Goodchild, this rainy night you must positively do *King Lear* on the stormy heath!”

So Aurelius, nothing loth if that friendly circle was to be entertained, retired amid hand-clapping to make his beard pathetically white with flour, robe himself in the camera-cloth, depress his features to a wild and woe-begone expression, and in solemn tones command:

“Lights down! And look out there, Thallie, with your front hair right over that lamp-chimney!”

Shadows and silence — then, with a roar:

“Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!”

He shuffled toward them, crouching, with sagging jaws, eyeballs rolled up, one tremulous hand raised alongside his head. His voice fell from senile falsetto to a leonine bass, when he howled dismally:

“Then let fall
Your horrible pleasure.”

But nothing could have been more effective than his doddering misery, as he pronounced:

“Art cold?
I am cold meself.— Where is this straw, me fellow?—
The art of our necessities is strange,
That can make vile things precious.— Come, your hovel.—
Poor fool and knave, I have one part in me heart
That’s sorry yet for thee.”

Exit Aurelius slowly, dragging his feet, too much an artist to straighten his aching back till he was out of sight.

His performance, however, served but to introduce another's: Mrs. Inchkin was next importuned to act.

"But, my dears, I fear I'm not at all in the vein this evening."

"Make an effort," implored Aurelius, bending over her in courtly manner, for the moment rejuvenated, still tingling from the applause he had received. "The Quality of Mercy! The *Lady of Lyons* on her arrival at the cottage! Or else, the Mad Scene!"

Mr. Inchkin, clearing his throat, advised his wife:

"Selina, give 'em That Cursèd Spot — the 'Macbeth' business. Don't you believe she's forgot it! The other morning in the bedroom she went through the whole thing while I was shaving. And when she up all at once and let out with that scream I like to cut my head clean off!"

"Ira, how can you!"

But now the ash-blond locks were shaken out. Mr. Goodchild hastened to find and dust a candle-stick. And none could say that *Lady Macbeth* did not suffer sufficiently, that night, for her wickedness.

In the inevitable encore Aurelius had to share the flushed Selina's triumph — a *Shylock* to her *Portia*, a *Sir Peter* to her *Lady Teazle*, perhaps an *Ingomar* to her *Parthenia*. Before the elegiac landscapes of the photographic screens those two could have reveled in the realm of might have been till dawn. The girls, since childhood used to florid declamation and serio-comic posturing, seldom smiled at the wrong moment.

After the show, Aglaia, Euphrosyne, and Thalia, with a flaring lamp, explored the cellar for refreshments. Those cobwebby jugs, that leaped unexpectedly into the light, were full of raspberry-shrub and cider. Those crocks, left stranded on a trestle when the darkness ebbed from round them, held apple-butter and pickled walnuts. All at once,

on a shelf a phalanx of jelly-glasses sprang forth glittering. And here, when one lifted away some inverted dish-pans, weighed down with flat-irons, the lamp illuminated mince-pies, brown, flaky, oozing rich syrups. Climbing the cellar steps, their arms laden and the light put out, at a rustle in the dark Thallie uttered a faint scream, Aglaia slowly turned to gaze behind her, and Frossie, with a breathless laugh, declared:

"We've waked poor old Icthiogriffipotamus!"

That was the name by which, in their childhood, they had known the fugitive dragon.

At their entrance into the studio, a cry of pleasure sounded. Mr. Goodchild darted forward to relieve his daughters of their burdens. Mr. Inchkin, without relinquishing the rocking-chair that he had occupied at their departure, rubbed his hands together. And Dr. Numble, if he was of the party, usually ventured, with a cackle that ended in a fit of coughing:

"I hope you girls have picked out something soft enough to suit store-teeth."

Dr. Numble, though only seventy-nine, might have sat for a picture of Methuselah. Tall, but much bent by rheumatism, he was merely skin and bone, with the slightest fringe around his bulging skull, with even his long, frayed beard and mandarin-like mustaches beginning to come out. His large, watery eyes, always dilated, gave him a wildish look, which was not abated by his smile, resembling a grimace of pain, so little, apparently, had he found cause to use his laughing muscles in the past.

At one time or another he had studied medicine and law, taught a rural school, edited a backwoods journal, preached theosophy. Now at last, after many false starts in life, he had found his true vocation. He was writing a book, "destined to thunder down the corridors of time," entitled, "A

Proof of the Soul's Transmigration, by One Who Remembers His Previous Existences."

A glance at the chapter-headings informed one that Dr. Numble had been, in the thirteenth century, St. Louis of France; in the Roman Empire, Antoninus Pius; in the Homeric Age, Prince Nestor; and, in those days when Atlantis still stood above the waves, a monarch of inexpressible magnificence and wisdom, called Yama the Great. Yet it was difficult to get much rhyme or reason from Dr. Numble's maunderings about his previous existences; one might be hearing of the seventh crusade, and take no more than forty winks, and wake up at the siege of Troy.

Nevertheless, his visits pleased Mr. Goodchild. Names, fragments of fables, classic episodes, that became dry and dusty at the doctor's touch, Aurelius, by aid of his imagination, made alive again. Perhaps he was transported into that nebulous epoch when every tree contained its supernatural inmate and every stream its murmuring voice, when the sight of brazen shields first sent the goat-legged people a-scramper into hiding, when mortals were liable to meet, in the deep woods, personages of majestic stature and unearthly beauty — maybe a pale huntress with an insupportable gaze, or a tall warrior moving like a shaft of sunlight through the green, or a proud lady brushing the moss with golden robes, or still another, slow-smiling, dewy-eyed, with a loose girdle and doves fluttering round her hair. After the pedagogue had croaked good night and shuffled homeward on his cane, Aurelius, pausing in the darkened studio, would often think: "Poor old fellow! How little of those things he really sees! How I could write of them!"

Who knew but that he would some day when he found time?

Besides photography, piano-tuning, portrait-making, and inventing, a hundred tasks continually put off his leisure.

When pictures had to be rehung, rugs beaten, wardrobes moved, or carpets swept, Aurelius came running at his daughters' call. Moreover, he had a famous eye for driving nails, could outdo a carpenter in a slap-dash job, and no burst water-pipe could squirt so far as to dismay him. There was little household damage short of that resulting from a fire or an earthquake that the father could not repair "for the time being."

The long struggle against shabbiness had taught that family many stratagems. What solemn consultations had they not held about the disguise of an old dress! With what cunning had they not ripped apart, turned, dyed, assembled in new combinations, materials of which all their friends must have been weary! The hoary furs that had started as white fox and found their final shade as lynx! Those hats, their pliant foundations weathering all kinds of winds from clover-scented to sleet-laden! And the inherited gewgaws, — brooches, bracelets, necklaces, — cut-jet, gold-washed, inlaid with scraps of nacre, worn on gala-days for lack of better trinkets, and with the hope that some one might appreciate them "as antiques"!

Echoes from the great world of luxury and fashion thrilled the sisters to the heart.

They examined in metropolitan journals the likenesses of women who bore aristocratic names, who seemed at first glance grotesque in ultra-fashionable hats and gowns, who had been photographed on the terraces of race-tracks or the lawns of country clubs, among a crowd of men fastidiously dressed. In the same way they became familiar with the estates of persons socially in prominence, with steam-yachts that bore some to far-off pleasures.

Then cities beyond the sea appeared in the zenith of their dreams, like those battlements that massed clouds form at sunset. Paris was there, all roseate, and a sombrous Lon-

don; Petrograd showed snowy roofs and crosses, Seville warm cathedral towers rising out of orange-groves; Athens seemed an apex of pale, broken pillars, and Rome a mammoth tomb of golden brown.

These visions all faded presently in a pall of coal-smoke, and the sky-line was filled again with soot-stained factory chimneys.

Still, the treasures of the Old World were theirs, at least, in the dull counterfeit of print. From books of the Zenasville Public Library they had learned the aspect of noted ruins, palaces, and churches, the intricate richness of certain medieval shrines, the gorgeous naïveté of famous Byzantine mosaics. They knew the splendors of the Tribune in the Uffizi Gallery, of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, of the Square Salon in the Louvre. They were old friends with Titian and Rembrandt, Hals and Velasquez, Teniers and Botticelli. They could tell the Medici Venus from the Venus of the Capitol, and, closing their eyes, could see the very creases of the table-cloth in the "Last Supper" by da Vinci.

But for all this they paid with a longing ever more intense. Thallie felt sure that in the actual presence of such wonders inspiration would turn her talents into genius. Frossie convinced herself that she might write immortal books, if only she could tread the haunts of Héloïse and Beatrice. Aglaia believed that fame was beckoning persistently from those distant lands, since only after success at La Scala, Covent Garden, or the Paris Opera House could one hope to conquer one's own country.

Yet Zenasville continued to imprison them!

At times, toward sundown, the girls, moved by the need at least of momentary change, penetrated into the country. The harsh air was scented with an indefinite new fragrance. The fields, though still bare of verdure, had a softer look

than usual. Under dun-colored thickets arbutus was in bud.

All at once each felt an unaccountable expectancy of joy.

"Spring will soon be here now!"

"That's right; spring will soon be here now!"

They spoke of the coming of the birds, the nest-building, the tiny eggs delicately tinted and bespeckled, the little fledglings; but meanwhile their eyes grew wistful. They envied those feathered passengers that gained all skies at will, and found their mates so simply. So they fell to talking about love and lovers, for them a discussion as nearly theoretical as if concerning riches and the wealthy.

Euphrosyne, her firm features set, declared:

"I love children. I know I'd make a good mother. Yet here I am with not a chance in sight at twenty-five. I don't think it's the way the world was meant to be."

Thallie, her sky-blue eyes fixed on the horizon, quoted with a grimace:

"'Sister Anne, Sister Anne, what do you see?' 'I see a cloud of dust'—it is the grocer's wagon! The days of chivalry promised something better on a walk like this. 'As the three fair sisters wended their way across the moor, they descried in the distance a glitter of armor, a commotion of pennants. Three gentle knights, Sir Gawain, Sir Uwain, and Sir Lancelot du Lac—'"

Aglaia, lifting her pale-fringed eyelids, sent at the others a swift glance as she retorted:

"Twenty and twenty-five! Do you realize that I'm almost thirty years old? Sometimes, when I really stop to think, it seems as if I can't stand it another hour. Ibsen's *Nora* spoke the truth when she said we all have a right to live our lives. One of these days it'll be too much for me to bear, and I'll just up and go, as many a woman has, and found everything she wanted, because she was n't afraid to strike out for it like a man."

The others did not reply. Their troubled faces confessed that they, too, had dreamed at times of some such rebellion against fate.

Besides, they often felt that their unprofitable living imposed too heavy a burden upon Mr. Goodchild. Nowadays fewer persons seemed to want their photographs taken, the pianos of Zenasville remained in tune much longer than formerly, even the craving for carbon-portraits had abated. Were it not for the advertising-pictures that Aurelius still dashed off in oils for cereal-manufacturers, the larder and the coal-bin might sometimes have stood empty. Perhaps the girls, unless they managed to escape, would soon be forced to put aside their dreams and learn stenography?

They returned in silence through the twilight. Familiar landmarks loomed round them; lights twinkled ahead in well-known constellations. Maple Lane appeared, its sparse illumination diluted by the evening mist, above which the homely gables seemed to hover like simulacra of real dwellings, all ready to dissolve as do the edifices that the mind builds up in sleep. But at close approach once more they proved all too real — the same old surroundings, the symbols of captivity! At the gateway the sisters heard their father chopping wood.

Mr. Goodchild, dropping his ax upon the kitchen porch, hurried forward through the house to feast his eyes on their freshened cheeks.

"Home again! And a fine, bracing walk, I'll warrant!"

They regained their smiles.

One evening in March, just after the street-lamp had been lighted in the lane, a postman blew his whistle at their door.

A registered letter!

The father spread out in bewilderment some sheets of paper; the daughters clustered round. All read the type-

and one another, they saw the family rapture.

They were rich! They were free! They were free before them!

CHAPTER TWO

A SHIP OF DREAMS SETS FORTH INTO UNKNOWN SEAS

“GOOD-BY, old home!”

It was Aurelius, standing hat in hand, one sunny afternoon in April, at the studio door, while from afar, from the roadway before the house, came faintly the voices of his daughters imploring him to hurry.

“Hurry!” So it had been ever since Aglaia had thought of obtaining at the Bank of Zenasville a loan on their legacy, which the law would not deliver to them for a year. “Hurry!” Each day in Zenasville had seemed to steal from the three Graces some of the freedom, the happiness, the fame, they saw at last within their reach. Amid the scramble of packing, the excited planning, the last rounds of duties suddenly grown irksome, that urgency had echoed through the house almost as if life itself depended on the family’s quick exodus.

The trunks were gone; the girls were climbing into the surrey from the livery-stable. Youth, with the portals of the future thrown wide open, does not pause to look back, pensive, on the past, as did Aurelius in this last moment at the studio door.

Standing there, he remembered with tenderness all his peaceful days of labor, all his moments of exalted hope, even all his hours of disillusion. Through many years this homely life had seemed to him merely the preparation for another, finer and more ample: yet now he wondered if the new delights would equal those of the ramshackle studio.

"Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!"

They greeted his appearance on the doorstep with excited beckonings, sure that they were going to miss the train, and finding the thought of one more night in Zenasville unbearable. But Aurelius, knowing that there was time to spare, very slowly shut into that little hallway the odors of the old sofas, lambrequins, and carpets, which embalmed for him a remembrance reaching back beyond the recollection of his children.

At last he seated himself in the surrey, beside the driver. The wheels turned, and then, indeed, the girls looked back and waved their gloved hands at the shuttered windows, but gaily, exultantly.

"Good-by! Good-by!"

And the yellowish house-front, the roof with its loosened shingles, the broken picket-fence, were lost behind the gradual alinement of the maple-trees.

They reached the suburban station, where the express-train for New York was scheduled to stop. On the platform Ira and Selina Inchkin were waiting to bid them still another farewell. The small hardware merchant, stiff-backed and solemn, presented self-consciously a box of candy from the drug-store, tied with a tinsel cord. His wife had brought a bunch of jonquils, which she apportioned nervously among the girls. Then there ensued one of those interminable half-hours of waiting, when everything has been said.

"We're going to miss those Saturday nights," sighed Selina Inchkin, for the twentieth time. No other friend would play *Sir Peter* to her *Lady Teazle*, *Shylock* to her *Portia*, *Ingomar* to her *Parthenia*. One door was closing on regions where she had felt the illusion of dear dreams come true. And her melancholy helped her to divine, at last, the end of her desires, to glimpse a day when her most

impassioned utterances would start no echo even on the town-hall stage — as when a cracked voice rises in a booth on the outskirts of a fair, without a single head turning in the crowd all pressing by to gaze on youth and beauty.

She wore the gray silk dress, indestructible, apparently, that she always donned for ceremonial occasions, that lent to her thin figure the peculiarity of a past decade. Her hair — a home-made confection, also frankly out of style — did not shade the fact that *Juliet* by her would never recreate suggestions of a girlish love. But Ira Inchkin, tiptoe in his baggy business suit, was whispering earnestly in Mr. Goodchild's ear:

"Don't forget, if you meet any of those big theatrical managers in New York, if you spot a proper opening for Selina — And if you need her clippings from the 'Zenasville Recorder' —"

"But in our week's stay in New York I shall hardly make many intimate friends."

"Well, then, in Europe." And with an accent of envy, "If Bernhardt and those foreign actresses can come to the United States!"

A sound of coughing made them turn their heads. Along the station platform Dr. Numble was approaching, shuffling on his cane, his brow covered with distended veins, his wild smile distorted by his exertions.

"You walked all this way to see us off!"

"Heu! heu! heu! That's nothing. I'd forgotten to tell you —" He pulled Aurelius forward by the coat-lapel, nodded mysteriously, dilated his watery eyes, and wheezed, "I wanted to say, you must particularly look in, while on your travels, at the site of Troy. Schuchhardt's book will direct you. I'd bestow it on you as a parting gift, but, it seems, I sold it recently. However, think of me when you view the Scamander still flowing, and the hot and cold

springs, and the hollows by the shore where we made our camp. And where we took the soldan's standard. But, no; that was when I was Saint Louis of France." And staring before him vacantly, he muttered in despondent tones, "If I, like you, could see those places in this incarnation! Perhaps my *magnum opus* would be the fuller for it. Perhaps I could remember better."

"And maybe," Selina Inchkin was murmuring, "we see you now for the last time? You'll find so many more interesting spots off there." She made the gesture of *Cor-delia* expressing a pathetic resignation. "Anyway, Frossie must send me every book she writes, and Thallie the notices of each picture she shows in the Salon, and Aggie the clippings about all her débuts in grand opera."

"Of course we'll write you many, many letters!" Thallie protested, her eyes moist, filled with pity for these poor friends who had to end their lives in Zenasville.

"Of course," Euphrosyne assented quietly.

Aglaia, though smiling sympathetically, promised nothing. She reached out her slender hand to fasten three buttons on the back of Thallie's waist. One came loose in her fingers; she put it in her purse.

A stir ran along the platform; a faint quivering disturbed the air; one saw the New York express, the engine rapidly expanding beneath a ball of thick, white smoke that mushroomed like the vapors of a volcano. The train rushed past, roaring, as if it were not going to stop at all. But at last the long cars rumbled to a standstill; brakemen descended from the vestibules; ahead, the familiar, battered trunks, the heirlooms which had not been used for thirty years, disappeared into the baggage-car.

And now the fumbling handclasps, the kisses falling amiss, the haphazard, incoherent farewell of persons bewildered by a strange activity. The four adventurers

crowded the vestibule of their car, which glided faster, faster, faster. They saw their old friends dwindling, Mr. Inchkin waving his conservative farewell, Selina wildly fluttering a handkerchief, Dr. Numble leaning forward on his cane, his grimace no longer even vaguely suggestive of a smile. Some sheds whirled past, then cottages, then fields, and Zenasville was gone.

In the sleeping-car, surrounded by plush upholstery and glistening woods that seemed to prefigure the luxurious future, the Goodchild family gazed at one another with startled eyes.

"So we're off!"

"To think we're really off at last!"

Amid their incredulity there lurked a sort of apprehension, as if this good fortune were beyond their just deserts, and could not last.

Dinner-time came round. They went in to a meal of several courses, served, beneath flowerlike electric lamps, by a discreet mulatto in a white-duck coat. They ate little; they talked in monosyllables; they were awed by this passage from one world into another. But at the end of their repast the same thought suddenly occurred to all—how amazed their neighbors would be if each of them, from force of habit, caught up some plates and started for the kitchen. So, after all, they ended their evening meal, as usual, with a good laugh.

Again in their seats, staring out through the black window-panes, the sisters wondered what fate was preparing for them far off in the darkness, beyond the untraveled leagues of land and sea. In what form, after what adventures, would renown and love appear to them? But fate allowed their souls no clearer vision than the night allowed their eyes: the future still benevolently veiled both their impending griefs and joys. That night one and all lay long

awake, the tremor of the speeding train matched by the persistent agitation of their nerves.

Next morning Euphrosyne promptly raised the window-shade beside her pillow. The early sunshine revealed a city's suburbs, to her imagination almost foreign-looking.

"Girls!"

In the upper berth Aglaia stirred; beside Frossie, Thalia woke with a low gasp.

"Are we wrecked?"

"Smashed into splinters, Goosey! Look!"

Cheek by cheek, their faces flushed from sleep, their thick braids hanging down about their necks, the two sisters peered out of the window at the passing streets.

"If it should be New York already!"

"Then where are the skyscrapers?"

"There."

"Bah! Only eight stories high?"

"Oh, the dear little marble doorsteps all in a row!"

"It's Philadelphia," announced Euphrosyne.

But two hours later they were in New York.

A taxicab bore them recklessly through a prodigious clatter, amid traffic that seemed in constant danger of collision, between buildings that leaned half-way across the sky. There stole through them a feeling of defenselessness, of insignificance. Before the hotel which they had chosen — carved portico, glimpses of marble pillars and palm-trees within, servants rigged out in gaudy livery — Aurelius completely lost his courage. Waving back the porters, he called to the chauffeur to drive on; and after careering through the streets for half an hour, they found a family hotel like a dingy obelisk, sufficiently unfashionable to abate their reluctance. The clerk offered to board and lodge them all for fifteen dollars a day.

"Fifteen!" Thallie's mouth fell open, Euphrosyne

turned slightly pale, Mr. Goodchild's hunted look gave place to consternation. But Aglaia, her emerald-green eyes already calm again, moved forward, touched her father's arm, and murmured:

"This is New York. Let's make the best of it."

They made the best of it.

From their high rooms they looked out at a New York beyond their expectations — a city of bright towers rising far into the limpid air. Each unique in detail, though all shaped slenderly for the same defiance of the heavens, those structures seemed to float above the humbler roofs like the vision of a more audacious civilization than to-day's. And far off to the south, where the haze of distance thickened, other edifices appeared, only vaguely showing all their upward flight, their domes sending forth soft glimmerings from the midst of space.

But down below, in the streets that resembled the bottoms of crevasses, humanity was rendered trivial by its own works. Those tiny creatures rippling along the pavements were not individuals, but the seething system of one physical body, each atom linked to the rest by invisible ganglia which drove all to an equal agitation. And the thought came to Aurelius that here he saw humanity revealed somewhat as it might look to God — a whole made up of countless parts, all moving in many ways toward the same ends, none more important than the rest, none injured or benefited without some subtle alteration of the whole.

Yet when he descended into the streets, he regained the feeling that his fellows were vastly different from one another.

The Broadway crowd looked alien to these Middle-Westerners. In one block Aurelius saw half a dozen racial types. "It is like Rome in the days of the Empire," he exclaimed. "The foreign hordes! Here a rich plebeian

from the East! There a mime, unless I mistake the eternal physiognomy of the actor —”

“Also,” Aglaia remarked, with the shadow of a smile, “the *famosae* in all their gauds.”

“*Famosae*, Aggie! Just because these ladies’ dresses seem somewhat daring to us quiet people?”

“Poor old dad,” Aglaia thought, “what world was he meant to live in?”

But when they found Fifth Avenue, New York at last fulfilled the girls’ anticipations. Here rolled the motor-cars with crested panels, full of flowers and furs. Here alighted the young girls who had stepped out of the fashion-books, impressively bizarre in their costumes of the latest hour. But the show-windows suggested even more extravagance than one saw in motion on this thoroughfare. Passing the classic restaurants, the famous hotels, the mansions like foreign palaces, the three Graces wondered if their happiness would ever equal that of women who were born to such surroundings. For the moment the prospect before them — the voyage and strange lands, the long study and slow climb to triumph in their chosen arts — seemed less inspiring than formerly.

All at once they drew Aurelius toward the shops.

In spacious rooms lined with mirrors, salesgirls advanced upon them, willowy in black satin frocks of the most recent cut, with the bearing of Oriental handmaids raised, through some pasha’s caprice, to feminine authority. A suave patronage underlay their words and gestures as their glances ran over these garments that had come from Zenasville, as they exhibited the gowns of lace, of cloth of silver, of painted gauze and glittering embroidery. Mr. Goodchild, seated in a corner, nervously smoothing his thick, tangled beard, blinked at this finery, such as he had never seen before. Euphrosyne and Thalia, afflicted by sensations of

humbleness, fell mute. Aglaia, however, after calmly pricing and examining everything, at last ended her sisters' torments with the nonchalant remark: "I guess before we finally decide we'll look a little farther." But for her, their retreat would have been a flight.

Thallie, blushing in the sunshine, cried:

"What must they think of us, buying nothing after putting them to so much trouble!"

"Who cares what they think? All the same, they gave me some ideas. And now we'll go to the department stores, and get off cheaper."

But it was not till three days later that the sisters managed to reform their dress completely.

At first they hardly knew one another in those draperies looped and puffed like costumes in a Franco-Persian comic opera, in the hats tilted at extraordinary angles, in the scarfs worn, as it seemed, back foremost, in the little slippers revealing the sheen of ankles through a mesh of silk. Thus arrayed, two at least found themselves abashed — till they remembered that they were, after all, no more than fashionably arrayed. And even Thallie was moved to favor her new outfit with an unprecedented care, herself replacing every hook and button lost, and mending every hole at once in the heels of her silk stockings.

In that transformation each, to be sure, had made concessions to her nature. Frossie's colors were the quietest, her whole attire, as befitted her serious features, pince-nez, bright-red hair, the most conservative. Thallie had chosen clear hues and indecisive contours, according with her vivid, though still uncompleted, loveliness. But Aglaia's was, perhaps, the greatest triumph. Though garbed with the sophisticated daintiness of a young matron breathing the very air of style, she managed to look younger than Euphrosyne.

The swift change in them surprised the other patrons of the family hotel — the elderly ladies who prowled the parlors in Egyptian shawls, the bluff old gentlemen who "put on no frills" with Mr. Goodchild in the lobby, the wives of traveling salesmen, who, every morning, eased baby-carriages down the front steps. These honest folk, humdrum even in New York, had not realized that the dingy obelisk was serving the three Graces only as a sort of chrysalis.

Aurelius, when they came to preen themselves before him, found his daughters almost too grand to kiss; he thought, with sinking heart, "I shall surely lose them soon."

Indeed, everywhere they now went the eyes of young men brightened at the sight of them. But the sisters, when they ventured forth alone, found that masculine homage in New York was bolder than in Zenasville. For self-protection, they were forced to end their clear, frank gazing, to repress the friendly interest natural to their faces, to assume the mask that discreet young girls must wear in the great cities.

"Why, these New York men are terrible!" protested Thallie, though dimpling, despite herself, beneath her frown.

"It's clear," murmured Frossie, "that with the slightest encouragement —"

"I suppose men are men wherever one finds them," said Aglaia, with a shrug, "though I understand that in Europe they're even more frankly so."

The three fell silent, wondering about the men of Europe, and, after all, not displeased by the idea that they might prove "more so."

New York, however, still sufficiently amazed them.

They visited the museums and the parks, inspected the monuments, peeped into Chinatown and Wall Street. From the tops of sky-scrapers they saw at last, beyond roofs and

masts and shredding clouds of smoke, the sea, a-shimmer clear to the horizon. Every night they went to the theater, to watch the hysterics of the problem-plays or the sensuous confusion of the musical comedies. It was Thallie who decided that the drama in New York was immoral.

"The drama, maybe," Euphrosyne assented; "but the musical shows are less immoral than amoral."

"Most of them are imported from Europe," Aglaia volunteered. "Even pruned a bit, they say, before we see them!"

And the sisters pictured for themselves those lands whose amusements so shamelessly confessed their cynicism.

But at concerts they could approve of everything they heard. One afternoon they attended a song-recital by Mme. Bertha Linkow, a famous soprano whose season at the Metropolitan had just ended.

They sat far back in a sea of millinery that spread through the concert-hall clear under the wide sweep of the boxes. On the stage appeared a tall, robust woman, majestic even in an azure gown of the most fashionable eccentricity. Her voice, stealing out above the throng, was like warm, flawless gold. She sang "Nymphs and Shepherds," "*Wie mir's Weh thut*," Carey's "*Pastorale*," and other numbers also. When the first group of her selections was done, the sisters sat silent, their hands half open on their laps, their hearts deeply moved by all those exquisite sounds. But at last Aglaia, with an accent maybe due to envy, murmured:

"I'm sure she scooped three times in Grieg's '*Lauf der Welt*.'"

The recital ending, the women of the audience swarmed toward the stage; the girls dragged Aurelius forward, too. Now they saw the prima donna at close-quarters. Bowing and beaming, her arms full of roses, she glowed with the wholesome blond beauty of a magnificent peasant. She

was nearer forty than thirty, yet that night they all dreamed of her.

Every night, for that matter, the sisters' sleep was troubled by recollections of the day. The Morgan Collection seemed the setting for some white slave drama; the Stock Exchange was suddenly filled with whirling chorus-girls; the men who had followed them in the street rode by, ironically smiling, in the motor-cars of the "society queens."

Aurelius, when he stretched his tired limbs between the sheets, mused for a while on all the marvels of the city. Each reminiscence ended with the thought, "If she could have shared that with her husband and her children!" Sadness crept round him, as tenuous and penetrating as the autumn mists of thirty years ago, when he and she, returning arm in arm through Maple Lane, had ended their evening walk, amid the garden-plats, with a long kiss, and the words "Some day!" At last, on the border-land of sleep, it seemed to him that the expectations of that time were realized. With the ease of those who make pilgrimages in their dreams, he returned through the streets, the museums, the theaters, the countless show-places of New York, his wife on his arm. She wore a full-skirted dress of poplin covered with a fringed polonaise; a tiny tip-tilted hat was set upon her coiffure; long cameo ear-rings dangled against her milk-white throat, adorned with a double crease. The years had not aged her: youth was exhaled from her person like the perfume of a flower. But when they passed before a mirror, he saw, beside his gray hairs and stooping shoulders, the countenance of Thallie! In the morning, however, he had forgotten that disappointment.

But their week in New York was passing. The steamship tickets, good clear to Paris, were already in the hotel safe. The antique trunks, their curved lids plastered inside with gay-colored paper blossoms, yawned open, as if begging

to be packed in time. Yet the Goodchild family continued to run hither and thither through the city, the girls ever thrilling anew, readjusting their perceptions, and only late at night, when back again in the topsyturvy bedrooms, pausing to think, "Four days, three days, and we shall be in America no longer!"

Already their young, eager brains had profited by a thousand fleeting observations; but how much more did they not feel they had to learn! Hardly an hour passed that they were not humiliated by their inexperience, that they did not flush because they had not acted like "New-Yorkers." All their real cultivation seemed insignificant to them, compared with the *savoir-faire* of the metropolis. Their acquaintance with ancient and European literature, the histories of music and of painting, the political development of nations, did not, in New York, excuse their ignorance of how to pass triumphantly the velvet cord at the threshold of smart restaurants, how to order tea, how to tip the waiter neither lavishly nor parsimoniously. At last, forgetting even the art treasures that they had so long desired to study here, they succumbed completely to Fifth Avenue, to the great hotels where, if only they had known it, they learned lessons in deportment chiefly from aliens like themselves.

"She gave him fifty cents."

"Two teas complete are eighty, and her extra tartlet makes one dollar. The Baedeker for France says only one tenth of the bill."

"But this is New York."

"That fat one does n't take her escort's arm; he holds her by the elbow."

"In Europe a gentleman never touches a lady except when dancing or kissing her hand."

"And will they kiss our hands, those foreigners?"

"One could hardly object, if it's the custom."

"Who said anything about objecting!"

"Now the one in yellow's smoking another cigarette."

"If a girl ever smoked like that in Zenasville!"

"But this is New York."

"Maybe she's not quite respectable."

"Then which of them is?"

"Perhaps they wonder if we are?"

"Oh, Frossie!"

Thallie giggled outright at the idea of any one imagining that sedate Euphrosyne might not be respectable. The latter retorted:

"I don't think it's a subject to laugh at, anyway."

"But," said Aglaia, her shadowy smile appearing, "this is New York."

When they had paid their tea-bill, glancing furtively at the waiter to see how he received the tip, the three Graces went out to the sunny avenue. They strolled past the shops, as much to gaze on their reflected images as to view the window-displays. A photographer's show-case engrossed them; they contemplated the print of a bride in her wedding-dress. And they wondered if the fashions in wedding-dresses would change before their own marriages. The sky was fading between the white marble towers when they turned back to the family hotel, where their father was beginning to worry about them.

For Aurelius, remembering that youth makes some of its happiest discoveries when undisturbed by age, sent them off nearly every afternoon to "play by themselves." If they asked him, on their return, what he had been doing, he answered with a smile:

"I've been in much-reviled Nineveh. But the heathen, who respect the foolish, sent me back safe and sound."

As a matter of fact, he could hardly have remembered all his adventures.

When he went out alone, every path was bound to be lined for him with pleasures. Raptly he watched the multitudes in motion, the traffic-policemen erect on their sleek horses, the hooting, clanging, clattering passage of fire-engines. He joined the crowd clustered round a fallen horse, or gaping up at sign-painters, or peering into excavations a-swarm with trucks and laborers. This last spectacle stimulated his imagination. The derricks became for him so many obsolete war-engines raised against the encircling battlements of the skyscrapers: he saw the mercenaries threatening the citadel of Carthage, or, maybe, that hapless Greek host imprisoned in the Sicilian chasm. But almost immediately he became more practical. His inventive instincts were roused by all that mechanism in action. He leaned forward to trace steel cables to their drums, to know the form and power of the engines, to calculate the force of the steam-shovels and the pile-drivers. And his mind, in search of some improvement, some simplification, went darting hither and thither through the whole history of harnessed energy, till he was lost in a dreamy contemplation of the machines of Archimedes.

Then, falling into talk with those about him, he was soon moved to confidences. He, too, he confessed, was a stranger, from Zenasville, Ohio. And he might walk on for blocks with one of those chance-gossips, some honest fellow, in overalls or lime-stained jacket, whose good-will his homely friendliness had roused. But at last his companion would announce:

"My way lies over there."

"I thank you for your company this far. I'm glad to have made your acquaintance."

And, as Aurelius marched on alone:

"Another good, plain man. What a pleasure to come into such wide contact with humanity!"

If he entered a church, he accosted the sexton; if he found himself in a picture-gallery, he talked to the custodians. With the sexton, however, he discussed not ecclesiastical architecture but building sites in suburbs, and with the custodians the high cost of living instead of art. And presently, stimulated by such interludes in their loneliness, thrown off their guard by his quick sympathy, they also began to tell about their lives, of the slow home-building, the wife who was ailing, the daughter who had just married a fine young man. From these, too, he parted with regret, half promising himself another chat with them.

"Yet they say this city is cold, unfriendly, tricky!"

But now and then he remembered with a pang the little yellowish house, the studio, old ways, old friends. It seemed months since that separation!

On their last night in New York, after the play, the girls inveigled him into a Broadway restaurant—the Hotel Diedrich—for supper.

They entered a room embellished with marble, gilt, and mirrors, full of flowering shrubs and white-spread tables. Between the lustrous pillars, knee-deep, as it seemed, in the rich bloom of azalea-plants, the supper-parties moved to their places. The women, against a background of white and black, assumed a regal mien, conscious, no doubt, of their elaborate head-gear, of the scanty corsages which they had eked out with jewels, of the artful folds that pretended to conceal their forms. When they gathered together by their chairs, there appeared for an instant a dazzlement of pale satin, powdered flesh, and diamonds. When they took their seats, it was as if a dewy garland had been flung around the table.

The sisters neglected their suppers to watch those others, so gay, so much at ease, so well surrounded by dapper

cavaliers. They wondered what it must be like to live such lives, which they pictured as one round of social triumph and romance. They saw those women in exquisite boudoirs, receiving flowers and notes from their admirers, or whispering provocative epigrams in the shadows of their operaboxes, or swaying through a maze of dancers in some ballroom, clasped by the young man of their choice. And once more such things appeared to the sisters more desirable than the fulfilment of their old ambitions, at which they felt sure those brilliant creatures would smile pityingly.

But this scene depressed their father for a different reason. The strange, unnecessary foods, the many bottles of champagne, the air thick with tobacco-smoke, heavy with perfumes, throbbing with erotic music, seemed to Aurelius degrading stimulants to pleasure. He thought: "Could they not find recreation in some simpler, healthier way? All these influences must finally react upon the soul. So the ancients began to feast before their downfall."

Into an open space emerged a man with an orange scarf wrapped around his evening waistcoat, and a woman in a pea-green wig. The band struck up a Spanish tune; the pair, after bawling out some verses of a slangy song, fell into each other's arms and began to undulate among the tables. Slowly the pallor of Mr. Goodchild's brow disappeared beneath a wave of red. Looking away, he met the eyes of a gentleman who sat near by alone.

This stranger was a tall, rather thick-set man of forty, whose calm, smooth-shaven face revealed at the same time sophistication and a hint of gentleness. He wore a dinner-jacket; two fine black pearls adorned his shirt-front; on his left hand shone a gold ring set with a graved carnelian. The plate before him contained some remnants of a light repast, his tall glass was still half-full of well-diluted whisky, and he was just letting the waiter lay match to his cigar

when he caught Mr. Goodchild's gaze. By way of response, he produced a slight grimace of sympathy, an almost imperceptible shrug, an effect of having remarked: "Everything you suggest is quite true. But then, my poor fellow-sufferer, this is New York." And after his glance had passed over the Goodchild family in one swift flash, he stared into space as before, smoking at ease, his thoughts apparently traveling far away.

Euphrosyne fancied she had seen his picture somewhere. Aglaia summoned the waiter.

"Can you tell me who —"

"Aggie! He'll hear you!"

"Who that gentleman is over there?"

"That gentleman? That is Mr. Holland, Miss."

"Oh, Mr. Holland."

And fear of appearing still more ignorant kept them from asking who Mr. Holland was.

They decided that while he could never have been handsome, he was distinguished-looking.

Now the head waiter himself came bowing to his table!

"Mr. Holland has found everything all right this evening?"

"Quite all right, Humbert."

"If Mr. Holland is maybe going to look in at the Villa di Tasso this summer, I shall be there to welcome him."

"I may get down to Italy later on. I sail next week."

"A good voyage to Mr. Holland!"

"Thank you, Humbert. The same to you."

"He's going to Europe next week," reflected Thallie. "I bet we run into him there."

"You might think Europe was no bigger than Zenasville!"

"All the same, I bet we do see him again somewhere."

"Is our little Thallie smitten?"

"I? With a middle-aged man like that?"

"Do hush, girls!"

But Mr. Holland was tipping the waiter, not lavishly, yet receiving that tyrant's humble thanks. And he departed like a man walking out of his own dining-room.

"If only we knew some one like that," Aglaia exclaimed, "to show us the ropes over there!"

"As if anybody like that would bother with us!"

"Who knows who will and who won't before we're through?"

Then, realizing that the ship sailed next morning, that it was one o'clock, that nothing had been packed, they went home as fast as they could.

The next morning was all hazy from excitement.

As they sped for the last time through the city's streets, wild apprehensions darted into their minds. They remembered tales of storms and fires at sea; they pictured panics round life-boats on the sloping decks; they saw themselves clinging to a raft between two mountainous waves. But as they entered the pier, and viewed, through tall doorways, black bulwarks like the walls of an immovable building, there came to them a feeling of immense relief. That whole structure was so vast, so strong, so still; one could not imagine it even rocking in the highest storms.

When they had climbed the gangway, for a moment they wondered if this could really be a ship. The main companionway, with its office, its wide staircase backed by large oil-paintings, and its elevator, suggested the lobby of a fine hotel. On the deck above, a succession of drawing-rooms, music-rooms, and card-rooms completed the explorers' bewilderment. But when they descended to their own cabins, they perceived that if all above was sumptuous and ample, here was enough constriction to make up for it.

Yet they were pleased by the novelty of their close quarters. Mr. Goodchild contemplated his one-berth cubbyhole with the remark, "At any rate, if I fall out of bed, I'll soon fetch up against something." The girls, in their own compartment, vowed that the discomfort of the place was going to be a lark. But the steward abased them by complaining that there was no room, in these cabins, for such trunks as theirs. Good heavens! they had never realized what "steamer-trunks" were actually for.

They went up to cool their cheeks in the fresh air.

The promenade-deck was crowded with the sea-goers and their friends. On all sides appeared elaborate hats, costly gowns, large bunches of flowers. Straightway the girls felt the lack of flowers of their own, of friends or lovers who might have sent such parting tokens. Timid among these chattering and laughing favorites, distressed by the sight of so much gay attendance all for others, they retreated into a writing-room. And there they set about composing letters full of tenderness to those whom they had left behind in Zenasville, and till this moment of loneliness had neglected.

Euphrosyne wrote:

"We are about to sail. In another hour we shall have left dry land behind. At a time like this we remember the old ties, that are lengthening, but will never part —"

"How do you spell 'scrumptious'?" demanded Thallie,

"Do keep still," Aglaia protested, and penned the following:

"I have already heard several of the noted singers, including Mme. Bertha Linkow. For all their fame, each has some flaw that I have been trying to overcome in my own voice, and hope to eliminate in Europe —"

"My dear Doctor," Aurelius was scribbling, "you may be sure that at this moment I think of you, who have so

often, in those previous existences of yours, braved the 'wine-dark waves,' and seen strange lands unfold before your prow —"

Without the slightest warning, right overhead a whistle gave a monstrous roar, and shook the Goodchild family to the marrow.

"We're starting!"

Clutching their letters, they rushed out on deck.

The ship began to creep forth into the river. On the wharf innumerable faces were upturned to them, and the agitation of handkerchiefs was like a sudden flurry of snow. Thallie, tears rising into her eyes, waved a response.

"But you don't know any of them!"

"Leave me alone! I'm saying good-by to my dear old America."

Then they saw that Mr. Goodchild, his face twitching, was also waving to the crowd.

"Good-by! Good-by!"

And he was moved to quote in a deep voice:

"Each heart recalled a different name,
But all sang Annie Laurie!"

Slowly they floated down-stream, past the tugs all tooting their salutes; past the ferry-boats, with their watching passengers; past the busy docks, the clambering signs, and, behind all the rest, rising against a turquoise sky, the towers, like great vertical shafts of sunlight. A vibration spread gradually throughout the vessel. Now they moved faster. Looking back, one saw, across scintillating waves, the skyscrapers converging, turning misty, fading.

Aurelius removed his black felt hat. The salt breeze lifted his long locks and stirred his tangled beard of fiery red and silver. His lean face was illumined by a look of reverence as he repeated:

"Thou, too, sail on, O Ship of State,
Sail on, O Union strong and great!
Humanity, with all its fears,
With all its hopes of future years,
Is hanging breathless on thy fate!"

Their own ship, gently quivering all over, headed for the
open sea.



CHAPTER THREE

HENCEFORTH THALIA WILL LIVE ONLY FOR HER ART

FOR two days the stewardess admitted that there was a bit of a sea.

"A bit of a sea!" Every time their berths sank beneath them,—the curtains swaying far over from the rods, the woodwork creaking, the port-holes darkened by wave-crests,—the Goodchild family believed that the ship was going down. But on the third day, determined not to drown "like rats in a trap," somehow the girls got their dresses on, staggered up the companionway, plunged into the open air. At last, prostrate in their steamer-chairs, they saw, to their amazement, that the promenade-deck was alive with people apparently in the best of health and spirits.

Some, curled up among cushions and rugs, were gossiping and reading. Others, untroubled by the pitch of the ship, marched round and round. Forward, young girls and youths were merrily playing shuffle-board. The sun shone on the long, olive-colored swells, spread with intricate traceries of foam, that extended to the see-sawing skyline.

The sisters felt their disgrace. They recalled the fact that all the sea-going heroines of fiction were "splendid sailors." For that matter, could one imagine Cleopatra suffering qualms at Actium, or Helen's fair cheek turning yellow on the voyage to Troy? Yet when a steward presented under Thallie's nose a tray set with cups of fat bouillon, the poor child could not repress a moan of loath-

ing. As she averted her face, the woman in the next chair replaced a full cup on the tray, and brusksly commanded, with a German accent:

"Take it away, all this stuff, from these young ladies!"

Where had Thalia seen her neighbor before? Could it be Mme. Bertha Linkow, the prima donna?

Yes, it was really she, her abundant blond tresses pressed down by a modish turban, her wind-whipped cheeks more vivid than on the stage, her physical wholesomeness going out from her like a beneficent aura. And this wonderful personage was talking to Thallie as kindly as if the young girl, too, were a celebrity!

"I know. I also have prayed the ship to sink. One night when a number-ten storm was brewing, three of us, Madame Morelli, Madame Lodbrok, and I, had gone up to the captain's cabin for coffee after dinner. All at once, *platsch!* and that number-ten storm was present! And we three? Ha, there was little talk of escaping then to our proper rooms! We lay where we found ourselves, and rolled and rolled, and now and then groaned, 'Art thou still alive, Luisa?' 'Art thou still alive, Regne?' The captain, of course, was on the bridge, defying the storm. But you may believe he did not get back his cabin till that business was over. So now I always try to engage the captain's room for myself. It is more considerate, *nicht wahr?*"

"But that," ventured Thallie, timidly, "was a bigger storm than this one."

Mme. Linkow's eyes started to twinkle, but she saved her solemnity.

"Well, perhaps a little bigger, my dear."

Now Aglaia and Frossie were staring, their misery half forgotten. The prima donna embraced the three, so to speak, with a maternal smile.

"See how you are, from this fine air, already better becoming! And the — the storm is calming down every minute. So! Presently I shall prescribe a walk on the deck."

That afternoon, indeed, the sisters did manage to walk the deck with Mme. Linkow.

They could hardly convince themselves that this rare distinction was theirs. They could not help looking askance at those they passed, to see if others appreciated the company they were in. And every moment they were amazed afresh to find that the great Mme. Linkow was not different from other mortals. Presently she declared:

"As for me, I like what I like. You, as it happened, I liked no sooner I saw you the day we sailed. 'Those three shades of red hair,' I said to myself, 'and those three young faces, all the same, yet so different!' Therefore I had the chairs of an awful family removed from alongside of mine, and your chairs put in their places." She uttered a clear peal of laughter in recalling that trick. "You see, anything that interests me I must do, no matter what happens. But where is your papa, with his face of a saint in some well-known painting or other?"

Mr. Goodchild was still below, flat on his back.

"*Ach*, this will never do! Here, steward! Go down to Mr.— yes, Mr. Goodchild — and tell him his daughters are quite well again, and expect him to be the same."

So Aurelius, with an agonizing effort, tumbled into his clothes and tottered up on deck. He found the girls seated in a row beside a strange lady, and all three sipping champagne.

The prima donna met his look of dismay with the words:

"Please note that these young ones are not wine-drinking for pleasure, but only to cure their collywobblers. One glass for each, that's all; and here is another for you."

Aurelius, despite swimming head and weak limbs, achieved a courteous bow.

"Ma'am," he quavered, "I beg you to accept my thanks and excuses. I am not accustomed, any more than my daughters —"

"Oh, I knew you would not take any before I said it. Thank God, your children have already swallowed theirs down, and now it will do them good. But you must not think, for all this, that I want to give them bad habits."

"On that point, ma'am," Aurelius stammered, while mopping his pallid brow, "I am doubly at ease."

"Very well. For the rest, I am Madame Linkow, and a great chum of your daughters. I like them, and I like you, and I tell you, as friend to friend, it is useless to stand on all this ceremony with me. There is your chair. Lie down. You, Frossie, wrap him up in this rug. To-night I am going to have some light foods sent up to you here. To-morrow you shall eat small, but well: I shall see what that ought to be. Also, if your stewardess is as clumsy as mine, you had better borrow my maid —"

So it was that Mme. Linkow took the Goodchild family under her wing.

The sea grew calmer, or else seemed calmer to them. The keen air revived their bodies; the mirror showed their color restored, their eyes brightened, their charms regained. They began to enjoy the strangeness of sounds and odors, the moods of the ocean, the sight of a distant steamship or porpoises or a whale. Now fellow-passengers smiled and bowed to them, and a dozen times a day the prima donna, holding court in her chair, included them in the talk.

Or else, when she and the Goodchilds sat alone, she afforded them glimpses of her own life. They saw the illustrious singers whom she called by their nicknames, the composers of music who played droll pranks at supper-

parties like boys on a holiday, the men of letters, the statesmen, and even princes, all drawn, by one means or other, into the whirling refulgence of the artistic world. One perceived, in fine, a career among demigods who were humanized by a Jovian sort of camaraderie.

But Aurelius saw most clearly the stage of the opera house on a first-night. He breathed again the dust and paint of behind the scenes; he shared the anxiety that ran through the dressing-rooms; he took to himself the applause which burst forth at last like a tempest; and it was he, in the costume of a Florentine gallant, who bowed between red plush curtains held back by lackeys with powdered hair. Even that might actually have happened if he had begun in time? In his younger days he had owned a sweet, flexible tenor voice: his rendering of old English songs had enchanted his wife. Ah, well, he should realize all his aspirations at last in his daughters.

The girls had confessed their ambitions to Mme. Linkow.

"So! A painter of pictures, this little Thallie! And Frossie a writer of books? How nice that will be! And Aglaia?"

"A singer."

The prima donna's glance, running rapidly over Aglaia's face and form, lost a shade of its brightness.

"What sort of singer, my dear? The opera, I suppose? Of course; that is what we all desire. You shall sing for me one of these days. See, there comes a sailing-vessel! *Wunderschön!* How her sails are gold in the sun! Like a ship of dreams, *nicht wahr?*"

She was touched by beauty in all its forms, this robust, nearly corpulent woman with dazzling hair and teeth, with the pink and white skin of exuberant health. Though she ate enormously, her mental processes seemed as delicate as the faint scent of geranium that always enveloped her. For

the three Graces she became the most wonderful woman in the world.

Still, every day at noon, clustering around the bulletin-board in the main companionway, they eagerly noted the little flags that crept across the chart toward the coast of Europe. Soon they would be there themselves!

Meanwhile Mr. Goodchild had made friends in the smoking-room. There, enduring the fumes of tobacco and liquor for hours at a time, he listened to tales of voyages weathered and lands skimmed through. The man who had most often crossed drowned out the rest: he spoke the jargon of sailors and tourist-agents, became an oracle from whom might be learned everything about foreign travel. But soon, prompted by envy, some parvenu of a dozen trips would shout:

"Steward! A fresh pack of cards, and take the orders!"

So they settled down to poker. Aurelius, though he did not know a flush from three of a kind, was flattered when some one gravely held up a hand for his contemplation.

One day there entered the smoking-room two young men whom he had not seen on deck.

He thought there was something foreign about the cut of their clothes, which produced an effect of elegant negligence. Smoking cigarettes, they lounged into an alcove as far as possible away from the rest. Obsequiously a steward ran forward. Every one stared. Aurelius learned they were Mr. Hector Ghillamoor and Mr. Reginald Dux, who, with Mr. Ghillamoor's wife and child, occupied the "royal suite."

"And may one ask," he mildly inquired, "what are these young gentlemen's vocations?"

The card-players looked at him in amazement till one exploded:

"Ha, ha! That's a good one! A neat little knock, eh, boys?"

Hector Ghillamoor was a herculean, swarthy young man with the low, sloping forehead, short nose, and heavy jaw of a gladiator. His small eyes, sunken behind his high cheek-bones, habitually looked forth with a calm disdain. When he smiled there was something contemptuous about his large mouth. But he had, all the same, a name for the utmost good-nature in his own circle, where he lived a life of strenuous pleasure-seeking and sport. He was said to be very well off — even wealthier than Reginald Dux.

The latter, younger than Hector Ghillamoor, was about twenty-five years old. Not so tall, more nearly slight, he showed a fair skin. In his face a slight haughtiness due to his aquiline nose and drooping eyelids was counteracted by the easy-going curve of his lips. Now, when he noticed the interest he had excited, those lips of his began to twitch with an irrepressible smile, not so much of amusement as from the stirring of vanity.

The truth is, his father had not become a millionaire till the boy had reached his teens, so to-day the latter could hardly help exulting when he imagined any one saying, "That is the socially prominent, the rich, young Reginald Dux." These sensations, however, were not entirely owing to snobbishness. At heart he was still so sensitive to public opinion that any approbatory attention sent through him a warm glow. In fact, childhood had tried to leave him a legacy of such special emotionalism that he might, with another father, have been an actor.

Mr. Goodchild wondered if he had not seen those two come aboard at New York with a willowy young woman, a little girl, and three or four servants. But where had they kept themselves all this time?

"Ah," drawled one of the poker-players, viciously deal-

ing the cards, "you forget, sir, that if those kinds of folks were to mingle with us, we might give 'em the pip or something."

"Gimme one," said another. "As for them, I guess there is n't a soul on board that they've spoken to outside the stewards."

"Kindly try to dole me three queens this time. Nor what's more, that they will speak to while this here galumping caravel sails the sea."

But the following night — the last night out of sight of land — it came about that Reginald Dux spoke to Thallie.

Alone she had climbed to the boat-deck to say good night to the ocean. She found a secluded spot well forward, beside a life-boat. Leaning over the rail, she looked out at the horizon, where sky was distinguished from sea by the clear blue twinkle of stars. On the morrow the mystery of that level union of air and water would be dispelled: the strange shores would loom forth; the long-sought future, with all its promises, would begin to merge into the present. Perhaps, at the same time, all the anticipations of girlhood would change to experience.

She was startled by a creaking sound from the life-boat above her. A young man in a dinner-jacket, legs swinging over the gunwale, face vague in the starlight, stared down at her in surprise.

"Beg your pardon!"

His voice was rather high and throaty; he clipped short his words even while pronouncing them precisely; his utterance was easy, amiable, and somehow unusual.

"I must have fallen asleep," he confessed. "These boat-covers make such jolly hammocks."

Had he dropped from the sky? With a nervous laugh, she risked the pleasantry:

"Are you a stowaway?"

"Give you my word, I should n't have been if I'd known about you."

Sliding down to the deck, leaning gracefully against a davit, he smiled at her, half cavalier, half mischievous boy.

"Why did n't you wander up here the first part of the trip?"

"The first part of the trip," Thallie stammered, "I was ill." And at once she felt herself blushing.

"Ouch! So was I. And that's one more overrated pastime, is n't it? But when a fellow tries to murder his constitution the last night ashore, he can't complain if he has to pay toll to Mr. Wave." Lighting a cigarette, he stared at her across the flaming match. "By George, what bully hair! Am I still asleep? Mind pinching me?"

"Good night," gasped Thallie, and turned to flee.

"Oh, I say, if you go down now, you'll break up the whole party! Let's stay awake another hour and ruin our health. Let's pace the quarter-deck with knitted brows. 'Damn the torpedoes!' and all that sort of thing, what? Cigarette?"

"No, thanks."

"Tango?"

"N-no."

"Why so cruel? We might have a quiet cavort up here and take turns at whistling the tune. I do need the exercise."

"I never met any one like you in my life!"

"'Affability, that's wot it is. No 'arm, just affability.' Come on; let's romp about while we're still young."

With a reluctance at least half genuine, with a faint trepidation, a feeling almost like guilt, she began to stroll with him round the boat-deck.

He soon made her laugh again. He patronized the stars, pretended to find constellations with ridiculous names, asked

her if she would like him to fit the ship's propellers to a pontoon and take her aëroplaning round Venus. Demanding where she was going to stay in Paris, he threatened to bring the band from Maxim's to play every night under her window. He, for his part, was going to remain in Europe till he got bored.

His jests, his informality, through which now and then flirtatiousness threatened to show, his good looks, and attire, and debonair carriage that neatly escaped a swagger, ended by fascinating Thallie. She was even pleased when he began to reveal a certain good-natured condescension of manner. A companion so winning, in such romantic surroundings! Half closing her eyes, she found it quite natural to picture a honeymoon voyage illumined by stars like these, with a lover as fine as this young man by her side, whose name she did not know.

Leaning against the rail, they stared out over the waves.

"Good old Nature!" he said. "She sets the stage rather well to-night, what?"

She felt sure this careless speech masked a sentimentalism intensely congenial to her own.

"The sea is so wonderful!" she sighed.

"Right!"

"When I think of all the marvelous things that are waiting for us off there!"

"Paris, eh? Rue de la Paix, and all that?"

"Think of the Louvre!"

"Oh, so you're keen on art?"

"I'm going to be a painter myself."

"Really? Paint my portrait?"

"Some day, perhaps."

"Don't forget."

"I won't." A silence. "And now I must go."

"We'll have the moon in a minute."

He put his hand over hers, which lay on the rail, and suddenly his face grew serious, nearly solemn. His teasing, trifling impulses shredded away. The worldly difference between them, which he had long since divined, which even Thallie was beginning to perceive, ceased all at once to exist, as the furniture of a splendid room disappears with the modest hat on the table when the light is blown out. For that instant they were simply maiden and youth contemplating each other in the starlit solitude with the delicate, half shy avidity of spring.

"Good night," she said breathlessly, and ran down the ladder. But on the promenade-deck, repenting of that quick flight, she wondered if she had offended him.

In the sisters' small cabin Thallie went silently to bed. A long while she lay awake in her narrow upper berth, unsoothed by the gentle lift of the ship or the soft, steady breathing of Aglaia and Frossie. Her wide-open eyes again visualized his face; his careless, warm-toned speech still sounded in her ears. Every trivial remark she recalled and considered: and in his countenance, his voice, his words, she could find not the slightest flaw. Who was he? Why had she met him only to-night? Should she see him to-morrow, in Paris, elsewhere, too? She believed that she should see him again many times. She fell asleep at last with a smile on her lips.

Next morning sea-gulls were thick astern; the skyline was threaded with tiny sails; above the horizon dark smoke formed diagonal, intersecting lines. The ship's isolation was ended.

At last they drew in to Plymouth — white cliffs, budding green, a climbing town of quaint aspect; then off they went, up the Channel, toward France.

Cherbourg! The tender, piled high with trunks, lay alongside the ship. From across the waves break-waters

reached out, as if to embrace the voyagers and draw them in toward the low-lying city between. The Goodchild family, staring and pointing, inhaled with delight the air of this new land, which seemed to them like the air of another world. But amid the bustling passengers Thallie had not discerned the young man of the boat-deck.

Mme. Linkow appeared, more majestic than ever in her shore-going costume, a-rustle with silk, a-jingle with golden trinkets, her maid and a queue of heavily-laden stewards trailing behind. When she saw Aurelius and the three Graces her eyes grew soft, as who should think: "Poor innocents! It is I who must see them safe in some nest at Paris to-night!" She approached them with her dazzling, maternal smile.

"So, you were waiting for me? How nice of you!"

They descended the ladder together.

The tender bore them off toward the shore. They gazed back with a vague affection at the great ship that had brought them safe over the sea, that they saw now for the first time in perspective. They drew in to the quay, and just as the hawsers curled through the air, Thalia perceived, at the other end of the tender, her boat-deck friend.

He was with a big, sulky-looking young man, a little girl, and a smart-looking lady. The sunshine seemed less bright as Thallie observed that slender woman of twenty-eight, on whose face petulance was gradually eclipsed by a smile. It was he who was making her laugh. Worse still, he was so intent on keeping her laughing that never once did he turn his head.

In the scramble off the boat, through the custom-house, into the train, she lost him again. And even in the station at Paris he failed to pass by with the crowd.

"But he knows where we're going to stay."

They were going to stay at an old hotel near the Gare

St. Lazare. Mme. Linkow, before setting out to visit friends in Versailles, herself arranged their accommodations.

"And so, if we need each other no more for a little, *au wiedersehen!*" She gave each of the girls a resounding kiss on the cheek, clasped Mr. Goodchild's hand, sailed on to her taxicab, and was gone.

"How good she is! What should we have done without her!"

"Well, anyway, here we are."

"Here we are in Paris!"

They went down to dinner a-flutter, still feeling at every step the motion of the ship.

That hotel maintained rather mustily the atmosphere of the Second French Empire. In its public parlors, still furnished with black walnut and plush, even the chandeliers recalled a period of thoughtless exuberance. And the courtesy of grave, elderly servants completed the suggestion of an old palace, once given up to crinoline balls, now going to seed.

The table d'hôte room was occupied by commercial travelers from Belgium and Germany, bourgeois families, provincial bridal couples. Nearly all wore napkins under the chins, and chased the rich sauces round their plates with crust. Rising, at last, with congested, cheerful faces, they marched out, picking their teeth.

"How foreign every one looks and acts! What delicious food! How polite these waiters are — so different from New York!"

Everything, in short, was delightful because of its novelty. They could not take their eyes off the *hors d'œuvre* dishes, the tableware, the red monograms on the napkins. They were dying to see behind the screen a real French chef in his lair. But the lanky, melancholy head waiter seemed

Italian. They thought his appearance and manner almost aristocratic: he might be an exile, noble perhaps, with a touching history? They even pictured him in some semi-tropical clime, reclining at the foot of a ruined castle by moonlight, and writing, to the sound of waves and distant guitars, a sad love-letter in the same florid copper-plate hand that appeared on the menus.

Finally, replete themselves, they donned hats and wraps, to brave the strange thoroughfares.

The street-names recalled to them historic battles and personages. Each mansard roof undoubtedly pent in a domestic drama straight out of Balzac's pages. And one had but to close one's eyes to see these places as they had appeared to George Sand, to Mme. de Sévigné, to Margaret of Valois. Then the chatter of an incomprehensible tongue recalled them to the present. In passers-by they seemed to discern the heroes of Victor Hugo grown old, or Zola's humble heroines rejuvenated, or some still inglorious Dumas looking at life with febrile eyes, or Verlaine himself, resurrected into a pallid wraith that groaned at them the names of the evening journals.

Through the shadows of Rue Auber loomed the opera-house: Aglaia dreamed of success. As the Louvre raised its long rows of window-panes beside the Seine, Thallie thought of the masterpieces hidden there, which she was to emulate. And when, from a bridge, they peered across misty water at the dim bulk of Notre-Dame, Euphrosyne saw herself writing romances in which the heroics of *Esmeralda* were far surpassed.

Aurelius, on the other hand, kept wondering if he was awake. "It's a fact: this is Paris! That shadow is the Isle of the City, where Lutetia was born! Behind me is the very Place de la Concorde where the guillotine cut off the head of Louis XVI!" And, after a while, inevitably,

"But why must all this come too late for her to share it?" And then, "But who knows that she does not share it—that she is not here to-night close by our side?" A breath of air stirred his locks, and the mist, exhaled from the Seine, seemed to curl along the parapet like the flowing robes of an immaterial presence.

Back in their rooms, attired for bed, yet sure that sleep was not to be won for hours, the three Graces looked down from their windows on the street. Before the café across the way the terrace was alive with people. The taxicabs continued to bear jolly parties here and there to unknown pleasures.

"Where is he to-night?" wondered Thallie.

But gradually the vibrations from a myriad minds, the concerted supreme impulses of that city, the influence of Paris, stole in through the windows with the May breeze, penetrated the sisters' hearts, and filled all three with rich anticipations.

To-morrow! To-morrow!

A week went by, in which they blundered all over Paris. But the young man of the boat-deck failed to appear, and Mme. Linkow did not even telephone.

"Well, children, we could hardly expect to monopolize so celebrated a lady, with so many friends all anxious to fête her."

Yet even Aurelius was cast down by the prima donna's silence. All those tales of the opera-stage, all those grandly Bohemian anecdotes, had fed something deep in his nature which suffered now that its stimulation was ended. Also he missed Mme. Linkow's jolly, brisk guidance.

Their ignorance not only of French but of every foreign custom exposed them to trickery. Guides, cab-drivers, café-waiters, shop-keepers, imposed on that naïve, gentle stranger and his ingenuous daughters. Aglaia, however,

soon suspected that others were getting off cheaper than they. She began to match her wits against the Parisians'. Before long, as Thallie remarked, "franc-pieces were looking as big as dollars to her."

"O Aggie! He's been so polite: do give him a franc!"

"In Paris that kind of politeness is dear at five sous."

"But all the wonderful pictures he's shown us!"

"Does he own them?" And to the custodian, in the French of the phrase-book which they studied every morning at breakfast: "*Voici pour vous.*"

"*Merci, Mademoiselle.*"

"He frowned all the same!"

"His smile would hardly be worth the other fifteen cents," Aglaia retorted, as they emerged on the street.

Sometimes, in a victoria by the hour, they went out through the Champs-Élysées to the Bois de Boulogne. The three sisters sat side by side on the cushions; their father, perched on the folding seat, rode backward so that his girls might miss nothing. In those budding alleys, which afternoon sunshine had filled with a golden haze, they watched the passing current of motor-cars and carriages freighted with beauty. Euphrosyne forgot to rehearse the French conjugations. Through her pince-nez she viewed with increasing primness the passing women, exquisite in their mysterious artfulness, all with eyes that seemed to confess countless amorous triumphs, an endless knowledge of hearts. But Thallie, after marking each high silk hat from afar, would murmur to herself, "It did look like him, though, at a distance."

Why had he never called? Perhaps he was off on some excursion, or ill? Before long they might take up their own travels again without having seen him at all!

One morning when they had been in Paris a fortnight their breakfast talk developed that very topic.

They all sat round a table in Aglaia's bed-chamber, as that was the only room neat enough for even so informal a meal. The father appeared in his old blue carpet-slippers and shiny house-jacket; the girls wore kimonos. The mirror, over the chimney-piece of black marble, duplicated the heavy clock with its pressed-metal figure of a reclining goddess, reflected the fringe on the turkey-red curtains of alcove and window, and, by a flaw in the glass, elongated the face of Empress Eugenie's son, who was killed by the Zulus. On each side of this portrait the paper was covered with wreaths which had faded like the floral tributes in pantheons. About the doorknobs the paint had been worn by the hands of countless strangers, of whose personalities something still seemed to linger here, like a vague distraction, a subtle psychical tremor, which blended with the reverberations from the street.

Their repast — they were not inured to coffee and rolls alone — had reached the marmalade-stage. The French phrase-book lay open beside the beefsteak platter; Frossie was starting the daily round of sentences:

"Good-day, Monsieur. Is it that one can buy here of gloves, of silk, of lingerie, of shoes American?"

"If madame will give herself the pain to step by there."

"Mademoiselle, this madame desires of gloves, of silk, of lingerie, of shoes American —"

"And what good," Aglaia demanded suddenly, "will all this do us in Italy?"

A look of uneasiness crossed Mr. Goodchild's face. New habits to fathom, new tongues to struggle with, new railroads, custom-houses, hotel tariffs, and touts! Thallie faltered:

"But we have n't finished here."

"Do you expect," Aglaia asked, "to check off every cobblestone?"

"I don't care; I've always had a kind of foreboding about the Italians. Folks say they're so dangerous."

"Plenty of others go to Italy and live through it. Besides, everybody seems to agree that the best music-teachers are there."

"Oh, of course, if your music's the only thing in this family!"

"Children, children!"

"What do you say, Frossie?" Aglaia inquired.

"I'd just as soon. I've got enough atmosphere out of Paris to do my novel about King Henry of Navarre."

Thallie's lip quivered.

"It makes no difference to either of you that Paris is the center of painting for the whole world!"

"Then why do so many artists go to Florence, for instance?"

"Florence! I know I shall hate it."

"You'll be much better able to judge about that at first-hand," Aglaia replied, her emerald eyes unnaturally serene.

Thallie hid her face against Mr. Goodchild's shiny house-jacket. Quickly his arm went round her shoulder, his heart turned over: for in that instant it seemed to him that another, long since lost, had laid her cheek on his breast.

"Aggie, if the poor child enjoys Paris so —"

From Thallie, in muffled tones:

"I don't enjoy it. I have n't enjoyed one minute of it yet. Nothing happens the way I want it to! And just because I'm the youngest —"

"My dears," said Mr. Goodchild, "I think we may very easily stay here a little while longer."

Thallie gave him a hug of gratitude. There fell a silence pervaded by surprise. It had not occurred to the sisters that the last word might lie with their father.

So they stayed on in Paris.

Thallie made a pretense, at first, of going every day to the Louvre. Drifting into that cool, white, echoing place, she ignored the marbles and bronzes, climbed the grand staircase, at last reached the picture-gallery. She let her eyes rest on Perugino's "Madonna," on da Vinci's "La Belle Ferronnière," on Titian's "Entombment." She tried to analyze the elements of those hues, meanwhile making with her hand little gestures in imitation of brush-strokes. But all the rest of the paintings seemed to crowd nearer, to press their details on her sight with an insupportable weight. She went off, listless, to learn how Velasquez had spread his thin pigments. But while passing the windows she saw young men in spring attire sauntering through the gardens.

In the evening they went to the Théâtre Français. Mounet-Sully played in "Ædipus," but not, according to Mr. Goodchild, in the true classic manner. Greek drama, the father maintained, was conceived in a spirit of lofty impersonality. The cothurni and the mask effaced the actor, and what Athenian audience would have stood the spectacle of an *Ædipus* with bleeding eye-sockets! Then Aurelius dived head-foremost into Greek literature. He spoke of meters,—elegiac, lyric, iambic,—the Dorian and the Æolian schools, the religious origins of Hellenic verse. But his daughters, formerly quick to respond to such words, were no longer listening. Their attention was riveted on the boxes, where ladies of title, in high-neck dresses, wearing hats of ultramarine and mauve, lowered their eyes at the compliments of dashing young attachés of the embassies.

Still Thallie's gaze, preoccupied, troubled, went roaming for a young man whose name she did not know. Sometimes she felt a swift, hot thrill beneath her heart; her eyes flashed through the crowds with the terrified, blissful conviction, "At last!" Then, seeing more clearly, she realized it was

PROPERTY
OF THE
NEW YORK
SOCIETY LIBRARY

only another who by some trick of gesture or dress had suggested him. All her fancies of how they should meet again, of what he would say, or what she would say in reply, were scattered like thistle-down before a chill blast. She followed her sisters with a lassitude that presently extended to them.

They recalled Ohio, where lilac was flowering now. They remembered the studio, the cellar guarded by the fugitive dragon, the theatricals of Saturday night. They stepped into a shop, and sent off some picture post-cards to the Inchkins and Dr. Numble.

And still Mme. Linkow, whom they had been so proud to call their friend, ignored them.

"After all," said Aglaia, with a bitter smile, "why should that surprise us? She has the artistic temperament. We amused her till we ceased to be a novelty. But, anyway, she might have heard me sing and given me some advice."

Yet in the bottom of her heart Aglaia felt an inexplicable relief that Mme. Linkow had not heard her sing.

She, too, had grown distrait. Every day she was more impatient to get on to Italy. An old English lady in their hotel, who professed to know all the prima donnas except Mme. Linkow, had told her that there lived in Florence a singing-teacher named Valentino Mughetto, who was "the last master of the true *bel canto*." One night, when the Goodchilds were sitting in a gay music-hall, Aglaia's exasperation reached its climax.

It was their first experience with the Parisian *revue*. On the stage, set to represent a statue-scattered grove, the chorus kept reappearing in ever scantier costumes. Throughout the first act the principals expressed by pantomime enough of their purpose to make Mr. Goodchild doubt his sight. But when the curtain fell, the last tableau

braids, partly buried in the pillow, slumber and shadows smoothed away whatever had been too strong. Her half-open mouth showed an eager, nearly infantile curve. One would have said that her soul was contemplating distant regions which some day might bring her, in waking hours, an equal beauty.

Thallie approached the window. The café across the way was dark; the street was almost deserted. A taxicab passed, bearing home two belated revelers: a woman who resembled those of the music-hall supported against her shoulder the profile of a slumbering man. Thallie watched that couple until they disappeared. Her thoughts pursued them still farther — indefinite thoughts, here and there illumined by intuition with crimson flashes. Then all her conjectures recoiled across the secret roofs of Paris. With a shiver, she turned from the window and entered Aglaia's room.

On nearing the bed, she saw her eldest sister's eyes fixed steadily on hers. Aglaia, as if she had been all the while awake, demanded:

"Well, what is it now?"

Lying motionless, the bedclothes clinging about her form, she appeared in the faint light like a fragile image chiseled out of pale gold. Around her hung a faint odor of roses from the cold cream with which of late she covered her face at night.

"What is it?" Aglaia repeated none too warmly. "Perhaps you've thought of some other nice little thing that you'd like to see in Paris!"

Sinking down upon the edge of the bed, Thallie lowered her face.

"O Aggie, don't be mean to me now! I'm ready to go to-morrow,— to-day, that is,— if you want."

Aglaia studied her sister without any sign of satisfaction.

"Why did you work it to stay on here, anyhow? You have n't been near your precious Louvre in three days."

Thallie's head sank lower.

"All the while that you've been so pettish and needed so much babying, what were you up to?"

Thallie began to weep.

"I wish I'd never left Zenasville! I wish I'd never set foot on that old ship!"

Little by little, between loud sobs, she confessed the tête-à-tête on the boat-deck, the long waiting, her glimpse of him to-night in the music-hall.

Aglaia's surprise gave place to a half-contemptuous pity. While patting Thallie's hand, she reflected: "Love at twenty! A moment of talk in the starlight, and all these tears!" Aloud, with unusual gentleness:

"Come, Babykins, don't spoil your bright eyes any more. Whatever your young man may be, he's not worth that."

"I know he is n't. He's not worth a good girl's second thought."

But Thallie wept all the harder.

"Hush, now, or dad'll wake up and come in. We'll go right away from here. Before you know it you'll have forgotten him."

"Yes," Thallie uttered in a strangled wail, "I'll wipe him right out of my mind." But she felt that a lifetime would not suffice to heal the wound in her heart. "Oh! oh! oh!"

"Here, you climb into bed with me."

Gratefully Thallie crept into that warm nest, snuggled close, and shed her tears, in a soft, rose-scented luxury, on Aglaia's breast. Between gulps and hiccoughs she moaned:

"It's not what you think. It's just my pride that's hurt."

"So sensitive, Babykins! What's life going to do to

you, if you go on so —" Aglaia ended without the words — "Over such trifles!"

"Not any more! Not ever, ever again! They'll see after this, men shall! I'll show them! Oh, how I hate them all! And right before every one, with that brazen French thing, and nothing at all on her skinny back, and her big, ugly feet like gunboats! Aggie, I've got your ruffles all sopping! Forgive me for all those spats. I've learned my lesson now. From this night I'll live for nothing but my art. And some day when I'm world-famous, if only I meet him then —"

The future reappeared before her like one of the bizarre hallucinations of childhood. A wonderful staircase, the summit of which was lost in a silvery glory, seemed thronged with all the great artists of ancient and modern times. Among them she recognized Michelangelo, Tintoretto, Rembrandt, Correggio, Degas, Raphael, Manet, Reynolds, even Apelles. They smiled at her tenderly; they held out their hands to her, and the tableau of her reception into those ranks recalled to her Titian's "Presentation in the Temple." Then, as she turned, to look down triumphantly on the past, she saw far below, gaping up at her in despair, the young man of the boat-deck, the blond girl cringing beside him.

Her head in the hollow of Aglaia's arm, Thallie fell asleep. But Aglaia, though her shoulder grew numb, did not stir. To forget her discomfort, she planned their next movements — through Switzerland as fast as possible, down into Italy. Italy, the birthplace of modern melody and of opera! Florence, where dwelt the Maestro Valentino Mughetto, last teacher of the true *bel canto*!

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FATES LEAD THE GRACES TO THE PENSION SCHWANDORF

ON the first of June the Goodchild family left Paris for Switzerland.

They entered a land where the sky was filled with amethyst and silver peaks, where lakes spread green ripples between steep heights of verdure, where steamboats released one into villages clinging round the skirts of precipices, the chalets shaded by a row of chestnut-trees, the casino a-twitter with flutes and violins, and, clustered behind the church, some graves adorned with wreaths of metaphors encircling a photograph. They saw the Falls of the Rhine, the Lion of Lucerne, the bear-pit at Bern. They peered through the clouds on Rigi-Kulm, shaded their eyes from the splendor of the Matterhorn, and, in the thin air of the Brünig Pass, bought from a mountain-child bouquets of edelweiss.

Then they descended into different country. The rounded hills, which all seemed sloping to the south, were covered with vineyards. The German station-signs gave place to French. As the train curved down through a meadow of spring flowers, all at once Lake Léman spread its sheen afar, while high above three motionless feluccas sailed, that nearly melted into the scintillations of the water. Mont Blanc sent forth the faintest possible lambency, like a daytime moon. Geneva was close at hand.

But Thalia, staring out across Lake Léman, thought

"Every change of landscape separates us more and more!"

Meanwhile, she reflected, the black-haired young woman of the Cherbourg tender was no doubt in Paris still, continually seeing him, laughing at all his jokes, and able, if she learned of his behavior in the music-hall, to tell him he was forgiven! And Thallie pictured to herself the attitudes of such a reconciliation — sweetly magnanimous gestures which even ended, maybe, in a caress?

As far back as she could remember, Thallie had dreamed of loving and of being loved. In childhood, it was she, and not Andromeda, who trembled in chains when a Perseus in the uniform of a West Point cadet dropped from the heavens to her aid. She was the fairest of those fair ones whom Sir Mortimer of the Fells released from the enchanted castle, which lay somewhere between Ohio and the Forest of Arden. Or in regions resembling the farm-lands south of Zenasville,— except that fauns scurried through the underbrush and Norman turrets showed above the treetops, — he came at a gallop on a white charger, red-crested and brass-bound like the centurion in "The Sabbath-day Companion." Drawing rein, he sprang down to clasp her in his arms; from his curls was shaken an intoxicating perfume of bay-rum, and the sun flooded them with such a stream of light as transects a woodcut by Doré.

While she still wore her hair in pigtails, Thallie enjoyed an actual fascination. Would she ever forget the ecstasy and shame that thrilled her when some imp in knickerbockers called across the school-yard: "Hey, Thall! How about you and Jimmy Veazey!" A thin, dark lad of twelve was Jimmy Veazey the new minister's son, nervous, phenomenally moody for his age, a sort of juvenile *Hamlet*, whose incomprehensible fits of melancholy, whose determination to be some day a missionary to cannibals, crowned him to Thallie's thinking with a tragic halo. At

children's parties, when they played "post-office," it was he who called her into the dark corridor to "get a letter." As the door swung shut behind them, she awaited the kiss with throbbing pulses, with a delicious weakness. And her knowledge that the others, giggling in the parlor, did not disapprove of this caress lent to the moment something as it were of marital legitimacy. But Jimmy Veazey's father, falling out with his parishioners, left Zenasville. It was a week before Thallie could be gay again.

Succeeding springs expanded her heart together with her person; but her sentimental yearnings hardly changed. She still dreamed of a hero who with one sweep of his strong arm would take her upon his saddle-bow and bear her off to his own place. For Thallie's nature made her assume in every love-scene some pose of self-surrender.

Presently she derived her most congenial ideas of courtship from the Victorian novelists; she found the suitors in Jane Austen's books alluring, and the story of *Maud Muller* descended deep into her soul like a premonition sweeter than the odor of lilies on a tomb. At fifteen she lost hope, as one who listens amid ruins for the answer to a last despairing call. She believed destiny had decreed that he was never to come. She saw him dying in some picturesque foreign land, like Byron, without having known of her existence. On rainy afternoons her tears blistered the pages of "Evangeline" at the passage where the lovers meet once more, too late. And she altered to fit her case more closely one word in some other lines of Longfellow's:

I remember the gleams and gloams that dart
Across the schoolgirl's brain;
The song and the silence in the heart
That in part are prophecies, and in part
Are longings wild and vain.

Then, swifter as it seemed to her than the blossoming of the orchards, she was surrounded by a different world of thought and sense.

The abstract romanticism of her former fancies seemed insipid now. Her ideal lover assumed the dashing, virile look of youths portrayed in clothing-advertisements, surrounded by motor-cars and bulldogs. The desirable life, while it retained the aspect of a perpetual honeymoon, no longer was graced with melodramatic incident. She imagined rather a "clean-cut young business-man" in a Norfolk jacket, with broad shoulders, a pompadour, and a cleft chin, alongside of whom she sat in a cozy home before a fire, while they told each other by the color of their cheeks what lips would not pronounce. And despite her recently acquired shyness, her half-startled introspection and her wonder, there coursed through her veins a new expectancy, an exultation, an impatience, that refused to be abashed.

Walking downtown, she saw young manhood as if for the first time. Yet when approaching a good-looking sophomore stranger on the street, she always felt as her lashes hid her eyes a swift revulsion.

But at last she had encountered one toward whom she could not feel that way?

Her thoughts were scattered by a jolt. The train had reached Geneva.

The blue Rhône, tumbling beneath its bridges, separated long quays lined with whitish buildings and avenues of trees. From the balconies of a pension in Rue des Alpes one looked across the lake-end toward a park behind which ascending roofs and spires fringed the panorama of the snow-caps. In the evening, when Mont Blanc reluctantly withdrew its glimmer from the sky, the shores of Lake Léman were defined by miles of twinkling lights; and from the

courtyard of the pension there rose, with a scent of dewy foliage, the quaver of a wandering minstrel, whose impromptu ballad, just as in the days of Bonivard, meandered through a tale of piety and patriotism, imprisonment and lingering death.

The pension was inhabited by some pleasant, quiet gentlewomen who seemed to have wandered over Europe half their lives. The after-dinner talk was about dressmakers' prices, towns where peculiar laces could be bought, the relative merits of pensions in Switzerland and Italy. All agreed that the nicest place in Florence was the Pension Schwandorf, kept by an old lady who had once seen better days.

Aglaia made a note of the address.

She begrudged the time that she had to spend in wandering about Geneva, in visiting Coppet, Lausanne, Montreux, Chillon. As soon as she was attired for the day, she slipped into the parlor, seated herself at the pianoforte, uttered, full voice, a phrase from "Madama Butterfly." At her first pause the crystal chandeliers gave forth a clash: some one up-stairs had jumped violently out of bed. But Aglaia went on singing till Thallie, Frossie, and Mr. Goodchild bustled in.

The father wore his loose black cutaway coat with wrinkled tails; a string-tie of black satin was negligently knotted underneath his bushy beard; his pearl-colored trousers descended in baggy folds to his congress gaiters, and he was ready to clap over his high, pallid brow the wide-brimmed black felt hat which his daughters could not persuade him to abandon.

"Have you got the Baedeker, Aggie?"

"Aggie, are my new gloves in your room?"

"Please, Aggie, see what's the matter with my waist."

"Come, children! We'll have to hurry if we're to do

the art museum, the cathedral, the town hall, the Russian church, and catch the train for Ferney!"

For that afternoon they were going to inspect Voltaire's château.

At Ferney they passed through a gateway into a fine estate, the landscape tinged with that melancholy which pervades the site of a departed greatness. Here he had wandered in old age, reaching out his clouded cane, nodding his wig, and showing his sardonic, gentle smile! The girls, as though the spring breeze had been wafted to them from the eighteenth century, seemed to see, at the end of leafy vistas, ladies whose silken gowns could be passed through bracelets, whose small heads, covered with curls, turned slowly at the sighs of gallants in black satin coats embroidered with forget-me-nots. But far down the *charmilles*, a tall modern, approaching at a measured pace, head lowered and hands clasped behind his back, drove all those charming ghosts away. He drew near, and raised his face. It was Mr. Holland, whom they had seen at supper in the New York restaurant.

With impersonal courtesy, he raised his hat and stood aside. But Aurelius Goodchild, finding in this strange land one face that he had seen before, was as much delighted as if he had met a long-lost friend.

"You have forgotten me?" he exclaimed, eagerly holding out his hand.

The stranger's glance, amiable, but puzzled, passed from Aurelius to Aglaia, to Euphrosyne, to Thalia. He replied in his quiet voice:

"The Hotel Diedrich, New York, May second, 12:30 A. M."

"How small the world is!" Mr. Goodchild cried. "But my daughter Thallie was the one to realize that fact when he insisted that we'd run into you again somewhere."

Mr. Holland had no trouble in identifying Thallie by her blushes.

He, on his every visit to Geneva, made a pilgrimage to Ferney. He knew the place well, and offered to guide them through it. As they set out toward the château, the girls scrutinized Mr. Holland furtively from head to foot.

He wore an outing suit of tweeds, a cloth hat to match, a soft collar pinned under a cravat of knitted silk, gloves of dogskin, tan boots covered with dust. He had walked to Ferney from beyond Coppet, a distance of fifteen kilometers. On the garden terrace he tried to point out that route; but the three Graces kept looking up sidewise at his face.

That was the countenance of a man who had lived forty years in self-respect — a visage at once fine and rugged, not in the slightest handsome, yet capable of expressing as much gentleness as sternness. None of them could imagine him flying into a rage or flushing with shame or giving way to despair. He irradiated calmness, strength, success. Surer than ever that he was in some way famous, they hung on his speech in hopes that he would let fall the enlightening word; but Mr. Holland went on talking of Voltaire.

The château explored, he seated them round a tea-table on the garden terrace. He took off his gloves; again they saw on his left hand the gold ring set with a graved carnelian. Aurelius admired the stone, which bore, in intaglio, two classic figures, one riding a ram, the other falling into waves.

"See, children, it is Phrixus and Helle! Am I not right, sir?"

Mr. Holland, glancing at him sharply, assented. The seal had been dug up in Asia Minor; indeed, he had found it himself.

An archæologist? But they had imagined archæologists as absent-minded old fellows in snuffy coats, with spectacles

pushed up on their foreheads, and frowzy sheafs of manuscript protruding from all their pockets.

Mr. Holland remarked that there were some extraordinary intaglios in the Naples Museum. Aurelius announced that in two days he and his daughters would be in Italy themselves. Aglaia, he explained, was anxious to take up her singing-lessons, Euphrosyne her novel-writing, Thalia her painting.

"And I may be moved to do something of my own with pen or brush. I have a feeling that Florence will inspire me." His mild eyes burned suddenly with their old-time fire as he raised his sensitive face and added: "Look at Titian! Look at Mommsen! An immortal picture, a great history, can be conceived only by a mind that has had time to ripen. These precocious geniuses — take the lamentable Weininger — sometimes suffocate in their own luxuriance. I except Keats; but, I ask you, was he really a child of earth? The theosophists would say he had learned everything our world could teach him, except the effect of such spiritual misalliances as that one of his with Fanny Brawn. We have also Rousseau and Thérèse, of course! But poor Rousseau; how can we docket a professed altruist who had in him so much of Casanova, who, in his unspeakable 'Confessions,' so often suggests the snob about to ape the socialist — though that, in fact, was a rôle that even Seneca sometimes seemed to play." Aurelius took a great gulp of tea, passed a trembling hand across his beard, and gazed earnestly at Mr. Holland.

The latter smiled a sympathetic, grave assent, while his eyes, by the faintest gleam, betrayed his pleasure in the novelty of this encounter.

But the girls were more interesting than their father.

Aglaia, in a dainty foulard gown the hue of autumn leaves, leaned back in her chair, her emerald eyes half-veiled.

Her copper-colored tresses nearly matched the burnt-straw of the outing-hat which she herself had made after seeing the original in a show-window of the Place Vendôme. Her thin lips, which looked at the same time satirical and ardent, failed to express her thoughts; but her repose was pervaded with the subtle tension of a woman who is never off her guard.

Euphrosyne sat erect, her hands clasped, in the attitude of an hieratic statue. This pose, her firm young features, her eye-glasses, the prim arrangement of her bright-red hair beneath a violet toque, gave her a look of gravity. But hers was a natural, if somewhat stiff, composure, a rigidity that confessed a moral no less than a physical sedateness.

Thalia leaned forward, her plump elbows on the table-top, her fingers knotted before her milk-white throat, of which the double rimple showed between the ruffles of her corn-yellow gown. Everything about her seemed fluffy, soft, and yielding, impregnated with a vernal sweetness. Rich auburn ringlets were tumbling down before her ears. A peach-like flush extended over her cheeks clear under her small chin. The whites of her wide eyes were still faintly tinted with the bluishness of childhood. And her parted lips, "like rose-leaves filled with snow," seemed made to surrender to the first ravishments of love.

Mr. Holland, contemplating that eager, naïve face, suddenly looked sad.

"Where do you stay in Florence?"

They turned to Aglaia, who replied:

"The Pension Schwandorf."

He approved of that choice. He had known Mme. von Schwandorf for nearly twenty years. "Ever since I was young," he added, with a smile at the three Graces.

A warmth of satisfaction tinged Aglaia's pallor. Here was another who did not suspect her thirty years!

All together they walked back to the gate, between the trees that had spread their shade for the creator of *Zaire*. The girls wondered if this meeting was due to fate, if some solid benefit was not likely to result from it. A man of this sort, so polished, so impressive, who seemed to know all countries, who was undoubtedly acquainted with the most brilliant people!

He took train with them for Geneva, and even saw them to the pension door. Did this mean that he desired to call? Timidity prevented them from inviting him to do so.

"So you leave day after to-morrow?"

"Oh," laughed Aglaia, "our plans are always hit or miss. We may find ourselves still here next week."

"By that time," said Mr. Holland, "I may be back in this neighborhood."

Stooping to pick a scrap of timothy from her skirt, she bit her lip.

"At any rate, tell Madame von Schwandorf that her old friend John Holland sends his love."

He shook hands with Aurelius, with Aglaia, with Frossie, with Thallie. So, after all, he had divined the sisters' relative ages. They watched him walk across the Quai du Mont-Blanc, toward the landing-stages for the lake-boats.

"John Holland," pondered Aurelius. "Where have I heard that name?"

"His name makes precious little difference," retorted Aglaia, "so long as he's ignorant of ours."

For once Mr. Goodchild had forgotten to exchange visiting-cards!

"As for that," Aglaia added, "why should we build so many hopes on passing strangers? When we deliberately accosted him he was too much a gentleman to snub us on the spot."

"But, Aggie, if he had n't liked us he could have left us at Ferney."

"He had to come this way, or else walk another fifteen kilometers." And gaining her room, Aglaia sat down to search the time-table for the Milan express.

Two days later they passed through the Simplon Tunnel down into Italy.

They tried to pronounce the new wayside names, which they found romantic and sonorous — Domodossola, Pallanza-Fondo Toce, Stresa, Arona. They called one another's attention to mountain shrines, rustic pergolas, marble-quarries, lush fields where peasant-women straightened their sturdy figures and stared. They rounded a lake, near the shores of which three islets bore up chrome-yellow masonry surrounded by cypress trees, like the bright little realms of fairy-tales where the lovers live happily ever after. At dusk, they rumbled into Milan. The Goodchilds, believing that they saw on every side the Camorra, the Mafia, and countless independent assassins, hardly drew breath till they found themselves safe in the nearest hotel. That night Thallie's sleep, disturbed by the rattle of tram-cars, was full of stilettos and shrieks.

In fourteen hours they viewed the cathedral, the castle, the parks, and the cemetery, bought gloves, tramped the picture-galleries, ate a *risotto*, praised the "Last Supper," tried on some hats, mailed post-cards to far-off Zenasville, watched a religious procession, a dog-fight, a parade of soldiers. In the Scala Theater Aglaia recalled Mme. Bertha Linkow. With curling lip, she reflected that some fine day, when she, too, was a famous singer, the volatile prima donna would manage to remember her very well — would even pretend, no doubt, that she had discovered her!

Meanwhile, with this endless sight-seeing, how many precious hours were going to waste! But at last, without

having witnessed a single murder, they took the train for Florence.

At first they thought they were going to have the second-class compartment to themselves. But just as the train was about to start, there scrambled in a swarthy, lean, shabby man, with crinkly mustaches in confusion above his flat, vermilion lips. He threw himself into a corner seat, spread a newspaper, and, over the page, kept staring at the sisters with the eyes of a vagabond who watches, between the half drawn curtains of a great house, a supper of pheasant, truffles, pineapples, and champagne. When sunshine flooded the car, to their horror they saw on the ragged cuff of his shirt a blood-red streak!

Whom had he killed?

They sat perfectly still, cold tremors running over their heads, not daring to look again lest he see that they had discovered his dreadful secret. They pretended to admire the landscape; their voices died in their throats; at every movement made by the stranger their nerves contracted. At last the conductor made his rounds, accompanied by a carbineer in a three-cornered hat. And the Goodchild family, shrinking against the cushions, awaited the moment of recognition, of frantic resistance, of mortal combat. They opened their eyes. The conductor and the carbineer had passed on to the next compartment. With a glittering jack-knife the desperado was cutting an item from his newspaper.

At Piacenza he hailed a passing waiter and bought a small cup of black coffee. At Parma he finished the news, and again inspected his neighbors. At Modena he asked permission in English to light a cigarette. The spasmodic effusiveness of Mr. Goodchild's assent caused the stranger to proffer some genial remarks.

He, too, was a foreigner, a Greek. He envied them their first sensations in Florence, a city with which he was well

acquainted. "And what a city that is! A *bijou*, a cup of gold, a gem!" He rolled up his large, thickly fringed eyes, and a smile of ecstasy altered his face.

What sinister trick did this politeness foreshadow?

The warm weather notwithstanding, he had on a brown plush waistcoat with marbled buttons. His broken collar was held together by a flowing tie, below which, as the breeze made it flutter, there showed on his shirt a round spot, the color of the streak on his cuff. All at once they realized that these were wine-stains!

Mr. Goodchild felt an immense remorse. What a wrong he had done this man; how well he had been punished for that injustice! "It is not often," he thought, "that retribution is so prompt." He discovered in this poor fellow-traveler's face an unexpected goodness. In the ensuing conversation, Aurelius exceeded his usual expansiveness.

He disclosed to the stranger the reasons for their invasion of Europe, the hopes they had built on Florence, the name of the pension where they expected to stay. The Greek could not recommend the Pension Schwandorf. One ought to enter some nice Italian family, learn the language from daily conversation, and at the same time "penetrate the soul of the country." He wrote an address on a dirty scrap of paper which he took from a note-book swollen with newspaper clippings. Also, he named a singing-teacher much better than Valentino Mughetto, who, to be perfectly frank, was a charlatan. Florence, in fact, swarmed with swindlers of all kinds; especially one had to be on guard against foreigners who pretended friendship. He, for example, had been robbed that very morning in Milan while lighting a cigarette in the station. A chance acquaintance had taken out of his pocket not only some ninety francs, but also his card-case.

Mr. Goodchild made haste to produce a visiting-card of

his own. By way of exchange, at the other's direction he wrote down, "Monsieur Constantine Farazounis, antiques, curiosities, commissions, box 387, general post-office, Naples."

At Bologna rather reluctantly M. Farazounis rose, gave Aurelius a sticky hand-clasp, bowed low to the sisters. Alighting, he marched away arm in arm with a burly fellow whose shepherd-plaid trousers were badly soiled round the bottoms.

"What an awful tramp!" exclaimed Thallie.

"His eyes," Frossie volunteered, "with all those oily, thick lashes, were positively indecent!"

"I think, after this," Aglaia remarked, "we'll travel first-class." To herself she added, "And keep dad from telling the story of our lives at least to people like that!"

"My child! A good plain man after all —"

"A good plain sharper! My first impressions are always right. We'll be in luck if this one does n't make some bad use of your card."

"Aggie, dear, don't forget that the Anglo-Saxons, so-called, still have an instinctive, foolish distrust of dark types. But consider Galileo, Savonarola, Dante, the early Christians, the noble morality of Plato and Socrates —"

His oration was still unfinished when they arrived in Florence.

They emerged from the railroad station. In a sunny, dusty square surrounded by discolored walls, some old nags hitched to open cabs stood drooping in the heat of the June afternoon.

They had imagined a town of the sixteenth century, made up entirely of famous monuments and landmarks, in every part set ready for a comedy of Boccaccio or a tragedy of Dante. As the cab conveyed them toward the northwestern quarter, they still saw long blocks of commonplace dwellings

with closed shutters, and avenues all narrowing to the same mediocre vistas. Not a palace, not a loggia, not an antique fountain! Besides, since it was then the hottest hour of the afternoon, Florence seemed a city of the dead.

In a clean, wide street, with two rows of trees extending its full length, the cab stopped before a corner house, beside which a garden was confined by a tall iron fence. From the vestibule there ran out to them an agile, smiling little man in the gray mohair livery of a door-porter. And they read on a brass plate fastened to the wall, "Pension Schwandorf."

A wide hall, dim and cool, running back to a dining-room with crimson walls, was lined with book-cases and divans. On all sides appeared a dim confusion of ornaments: framed water-colors of gondolas and ruined towers, plaques of china and brass, strange weapons in papier-mâché, tufts of pampas-grass, faded photographs, and sea-shore souvenirs. Through a door to the left showed the outline of a pianoforte covered with Venetian brocade. To the right, behind glass portals, a large round table was littered with periodicals. The perfume of roses, diffused from bouquets placed here and there in vases, mingled with the familiar odor of old fabrics. The three Graces remembered Zenasville.

In the silence one heard, far off, the clatter of a bell, a faint cry of "*Arrivi!*" and presently foot-falls that echoed across long reaches of invisible bare floors. But suddenly, from a door in the wall, Mme. von Schwandorf entered.

Well past sixty, but with pale-yellow frizzes encircling her brow, she showed a keen, kindly face in which remained a hint of Scandinavian, rather than Teutonic, beauty. From her salient nose, her still delicate mouth, her twinkling, faded eyes, one might have read the history of a crowded life, beginning in fervent enthusiasm, now drawing

toward its close in resignation. Her loose gown, decked with many dangling points of lace, exhaled a strong scent of bergamot. From among the ruffles of her sleeve a blond Florentine poodle stretched out his muzzle toward the strangers.

Aglaia said at once:

"Mr. John Holland—"

"John Holland!" cried Mme. von Schwandorf in the eager, liquid voice of Northern races, that seems when most amiable always close to tears. "That dear man! How long since I have seen him! But surely he is not here in Florence, or he would have called. I shall show you the room he had nearly twenty years ago, with the very same writing-desk. Indeed, it is part of a suite that will do so nicely for you."

She led the way through the crimson dining-room, then, through a glass corridor, across the garden, then into another building, and up two flights of stairs. A maid threw open some windows.

The two rear bedchambers faced the garden; the front room overlooked both garden and street. The high ceilings were painted with mermaids, griffins, and harpies, in the style of the Renaissance. The walls showed flowered paper of the gayest hues and most bewildering designs. The floors, of broad red tiles, were bare. In each apartment stood a stove of green-and-yellow glazed tiles. And the chintz covers of the chairs and sofas were grotesquely printed all over with camels, poppies, monkeys, pomegranates, butterflies.

But instantly the Goodchild family found themselves at home. These eccentric decorations were not able to dispel their feeling that they had reached at last a long-sought spot, where many influences, still unknown, were predestined to expand their souls.

When they had thrown their hats upon the iron beds, they went out to the balcony of the front room. Already the broad, clean street, with its double row of trees, had a more friendly look. A breeze rustled the leaves; a few shutters swung ajar. A velvet-eyed lad lounged by, singing to himself a plaintive, wavering song. As his voice died away, a sweet, half melancholy peace enveloped them.

So Florence began to weave its spell.

Every morning one was awakened by the wailing cries of vegetable-hucksters. The girls, leaning across the window-sill in their kimonos, gazed down at the garden crossed by the corridor of glass. On either side, gravel paths encircled the grass-plats, from which rose palmettos and clusters of bamboo. To the right, against the street, the tall iron fence supported, all its length, a mass of pink and yellow roses, which finally reached out to festoon the concrete gateposts, crowned with two crumbling urns. An arbor near by was surrounded by a hedge of brilliant peonies, and under the sisters' windows a border of lilies disappeared beneath an orange-tree which spread its golden fruit just out of reach. But one tendril of a rambler rose had climbed the housewall clear to their shutter-lock: and in the most audacious blossom a white snail, diaphanous in the hot rays, lay glistening like a tiny pool of dew.

The perfumes, the silences interrupted by melodious, distant sounds, the riotous hues that covered old masonry and the trunks of tropical trees, combined with the fervor of the Southern sun to loose in them sensations that the warmest seasons of the North had not aroused. As their young tissues eagerly drank in this ether of Italy, their hearts expanded to a still subtler elixir—the drowsy ecstasy, the passionate and soft delight, which is communicated from a place that has known many centuries of beauty, inspiration, and love.

Presently, through the glass roof of the corridor, they saw some patrons of the pension bustling toward the dining-room, already hatted, Baedekers in hand.

They themselves, when they went sight-seeing, had to relinquish all their first impressions.

The pension lay in a quarter comparatively new, not far from Cascine Park. As one left that district for the center of the city, here and there amid the rows of modern houses appeared an archway surmounted by escutcheons, a façade of white and blood-red marble, a massive gate with torch-sockets of wrought-iron. Progressing farther, one entered regions where the twentieth century had spread no more than a thin film against antiquity — crass signs on venerable walls, show-windows framed by florid Gothic carving, statues of grotesque notables in pantaloons which marred some Renaissance perspective. Sometimes in narrow alleyways the cool gloom obscured modernity. And when at last one entered the Piazza della Signoria, and saw the palaces rising above a wealth of famous statues, the shops, crowds, and tram-cars disappeared in the refulgence of the past: the loggia was filled with jeweled doublets; the priors descended in their scarlet robes; as the bell *La Vacca* scattered its clamor once more from the great rustic tower all the neighboring streets poured forth their streams of weapons, plumes, and banners of the guilds. So redolent, after all, was Florence of the days gone by.

Aurelius, standing on the Ponte Vecchio beside the bust of Cellini, let his eyes rove down the left bank of the river Arno, where old buildings overhung the water as in Medici days. A fair face appearing in a casement full of flower-pots suggested to his mind the subject for a tragedy in verse. Fearful lest that inspiration pass, he jotted down some notes on the backs of hotel-bills already scribbled over with pencil-sketches — of flower-stands, porticos, and beggars huddled

on the steps of churches. Passing on, with lowered head, he bumped into pedestrians and donkeys as he reflected: "Her name should be Fiammetta and his Rodolfo. There is no reason why the Alexandrian meter would not be an excellent medium, if interspersed with prose dialogue in the comic relief, as in Shakspeare's Italian plays." Then his daughters called his attention to the New Market, and, with the look of a somnambulist, he exclaimed: "Perfect! In this porch, at midnight, I will have Rodolfo set upon by the bravos of Piero de' Medici!"

The new-comers' eyes were wearied by so many wonders. Toward dusk they were glad to regain the pension and spend a quiet hour before dinner amid the bamboos of the garden. But even there Aurelius could not repose himself for long. The sights of the day, still whirling before his eyes, sustained his excitement. When he remembered the Tribune of the Uffizi gallery he could not forbear to quote from Byron:

"We gaze and turn away, and know not where,
Dazzled and drunk with beauty, till the heart
Reels with its fulness; there — forever there —
Chain'd to the chariot of triumphal Art,
We stand as captives, and would not depart!"

The patrons of the pension, passing through the glass corridor on their way to dinner, paused to stare at the pallid stranger with the flowing beard of gray and red, who, erect in his chair among the flowers, declaimed with the mien and gestures of a *Don Quixote*, while three charming young women sat listening with indulgent smiles.

In the crimson dining-room the tables were occupied principally by Americans. Afterward, the main hall received the chattering crowd. Now and then the warm air was filled with bergamot as Mme. von Schwandorf, her

arms, passed smiling through the rooms. When she was gone the guests of oldest residence related her story.

The real facts were as follows:

The daughter of an impoverished Swedish official, she had been married at sixteen to a German gentleman. Two years later, a penniless widow, she was recommended as governess to the noble family of Buondelcampi in Florence. But presently, those children growing up, she became assistant to the mistress of a modest pension. From this venture the Pension Schwandorf finally resulted.

But Mme. von Schwandorf had long since ceased to speak about her past. For nearly three decades her history had come down by word of mouth through the generations of her patrons. Always gaining some fresh detail, continually embroidered with new sentimental bits, hinting ever more emphatically at vanished grandeurs, it resembled finally a troubadour's romance that has grown intricate and fine from repetition in innumerable taverns.

When they returned to the pension from their explorations, the Goodchilds often saw her sitting in a little cubby-hole, half boudoir and half office, beside the vestibule. The poodle asleep on her lap, she was reading Anatole France, while a ribbon of cigarette smoke curled out between the persiennes of the window.

"And what nice things have you seen to-day, my dears?"

As they recounted the details of their excursion, her faded eyes grew soft beneath the yellow frizzes.

"Ah, these first impressions, these precious enthusiasms of youth! It is like love: repetition may bring deeper emotions, but never again the so delicate delights of the first kisses!"

And when she raised her eyes toward the painted cherubs of the ceiling, one seemed to catch a glimpse of the girl she had been long ago, glowing, emotional, responsive, surely,

in every fiber to the hot sunshine and the ardors of Italy.

The sisters, gathered round her chair, were mute. Thallie, stooping to touch the poodle's head, concealed her clouded face. Frossie stared at the page of Mme. von Schwandorf's novel, those paragraphs of French no more a puzzle than the loves which they undoubtedly related. But Aglaia's speculative eyes sharpened as there came from the parlor a sound of music. Some one was playing on the piano a passage from "Tosca"—the "Vissi d'arte."

Once more she inquired of Mme. von Schwandorf:

"And Signore Mughetto?"

"Still at Montecatini."

Indeed, the "last master of the true *bel canto*" was hardly expected back in Florence before the autumn.

On the other hand, Thallie had heard of a painting-teacher, a middle-aged Frenchman, who was ready to begin instructing her at any moment. As for Frossie, her novel of the time of Henry of Navarre was half mapped out.

"For all my eagerness," Aglaia thought, "I am the one who must be balked!" And she wondered why her ambitions should seem to Providence less important than her sisters'.

In an access of will, she promised herself to pass, by hook or crook, every obstacle that fate threw across her way. She even vowed to attain her full desire before the others had finished their apprenticeship. But the notes of the piano, clear, strong, and accurate, reached her again, like the assured defiance of a rival. She went to see who was playing the "Vissi d'arte" in the parlor.

It was a young man, a new-comer to the Pension Schwandorf.

Slender, long-limbed, dark-haired, showing, as it were, the profile of a neurotic younger brother of Julius

he sat limply before the piano in a rumpled outing-jacket, and struck the keys with his white, bony hands. Suddenly, in caprice, his fingers ran from one end of the keyboard to the other, beat out half a dozen crashing chords, were still. The innumerable knickknacks of the parlor gave forth a long vibration. He turned, saw Aglaia in the doorway, and stood up.

"Want to play?" he inquired, in a high, nervous voice.

"This," she thought, "must be a real Englishman at last!"

"Not after you," she responded in a natural way, though thrilled with a peculiar exultation. For her voice, habitually low and steady, seemed the absolute complement of his irregular, staccato tones, just as her pale, still beauty seemed to balance his dark restlessness, and her calm gaze to quiet his unstable eyes. Many men and women meet for the first time alone with a very subtle and perhaps unconscious crossing of the swords of sex — a feint, a parry, a swift instinctive test of strength, the issue of which may determine all their common future. And Aglaia, even when those words and glances crossed, knew that she was not only more adroit than he, but also stronger.

As she realized this, her shoulders drooped, she seemed to grow smaller, wistful, and appealing, while her eyes, raised to his, expressed the sweet humility of the traditional weak woman in the presence of the "dominant sex."

"How well you play!" she sighed.

"That? Just foolery. Supposed every one was out."

He was younger than she had thought, maybe twenty-seven or eight.

"You're a musician?" she asked, while letting a look of hero-worship dawn in her green eyes.

"Goodness, no!" His expression told her that she had made an error, that he did not think very highly of mu-

PENSION SCHWANDORF

sicians. "But you?" he asked, with a tactlessness that nearly made her smile.

"I should believe I were if I could make that kind music."

He laughed, striving not to show that he was flattered, looking at her more warmly.

"You sing, though?" he stammered. "If you'll a song, I'll manage the accompaniment."

"To-morrow."

For she had heard her sisters in the hall, and she wanted to complete the impression she was making before he and the others. With a timid smile she drifted from the room.

Going straight to the guest-book, she read that he was Cyril Bellegram, of Twelve Chimneys, Devonshire, England. That name, that place, seemed to Aglaia curiously congenial, and as familiar as if the words had passed before her eyes innumerable times in dreams.

CHAPTER FIVE

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE BRASS BUTTONS, AFTER ALL!

A GLAIA, in all the sentimental phases of her plans, saw herself the dominating partner. For her, man was the adversary who must be conquered and despoiled, though none the less desirable in his subjection. And she had for a long time believed that any woman of determination and intelligence could dominate any man.

Nearly all her life she had studied them from beneath her pale-fringed eyelids, spying out their weaknesses, divining their lines of least resistance, and in the end forming of their defenses a low opinion that was mixed with jubilation. By putting forth her wiles in earnest, she might have held in Zenasville at least two youths, either of whom could have given her a home of mediocre comfort. But she had let them go, while her thoughts went forth from the little yellowish house to far-off places, where women no more adroit than she had won famous triumphs over men.

There passed before her a ghostly train of sirens, whose smiles, cast into the scales of history, had weighed down the swords of armies and the crowns of kings. At first, to be sure, she was most fascinated by the stories of Semiramis and Cleopatra, Zenobia and Agrippina, Elizabeth the Great and Catharine de' Medici. But soon her admiration extended to others whose successes had been won by purely feminine weapons. And sometimes victory's golden sheen almost eclipsed the purple of dishonor in the auras of De-

lilah, Agnes Sorel, Mme. de Pompadour, and Lola Montez.

Yet was she not as well equipped for war against the opposite sex as they?

Far from flawless trait by trait, she had contrived a general effect of greater piquancy than an impeccable loveliness. She knew besides that there are poses, gestures, glances, vocal intonations, more seductive than a beauty which refuses artifice. And discovering also which expressions best set off her features, which accents best accorded with her style, she confined herself to those, till from persistent practice they seemed altogether natural. Nevertheless, within those limits she could appeal to a variety of masculine moods.

She knew how to flatter without uttering a word, to let pleasure at some chance meeting light her eyes as if unconsciously, to affect with one dreamy, mute assent an accord that made her companion of the moment think, "How much we have in common!" Yet she showed one manner to the bold, another to the timid, so that each might find in her, for all her intimate sympathy, something refreshing, unprecedented, as it were the necessary complement of his own nature. Or else, she would plan to inflame one by a too impersonal friendliness, underlaid with the most delicate temptations. But in every case she remembered to seem less clever than her vis-à-vis.

These arts Aglaia had practised thus far only on young men with whom the game was hardly worth the candle. Now, however, she expected to meet antagonists whose enthrallment would bring her greater satisfaction.

To mark down one who was strong among his fellows, a man of the world, respected for his accomplishments, holding himself aloof in his renown and wealth! To approach him without his realizing that he was being approached, to draw him gradually on toward interest, to

encourage him, to discourage him, to efface little by little the images of all others from his heart! To undermine his self-confidence, to turn him into a being without logic, to make him perform innumerable senseless acts, and finally, at the complete disorganization of his pride receive his dizzy head upon her breast!

Then, at last, in Geneva, she had met a "man of the world." And her scrutiny of John Holland had disconcerted her.

In him she had sensed a deep knowledge of humanity. She imagined that beneath his courtesy he had appraised her in a flash, and then withdrawn his interest. In short, he had seemed for all his masculine strength at least as keen-eyed and subtle as was she. Were there men, after all, whom a woman of determination and intelligence could not dominate?

Her resentment at John Holland, her vain efforts to belittle him in her own mind, her curiosity about him, had lasted clear to Florence.

But now she had encountered Cyril Bellegram of Twelve Chimneys, Devonshire, England.

Despite his rumpled jacket and his tousled hair, that young man had appeared distinguished. His speech and behavior had evidently been acquired in excellent society. Moreover, he seemed a person who would be at ease in a far finer place. One may find certain men sheltered by a modest roof, yet feel sure that they have in their pockets the keys of palaces. Even to Aglaia, Cyril Bellegram suggested the traditional young prince who has disguised himself to seek adventures through four hundred pages of a romantic novel. She would not have been surprised to learn that he was related to the English nobility.

Perhaps there was a copy of Burke's "Peerage" in the pension.

The hills round Florence were "not bad," but one gathered from his tone that there were finer hills in Devonshire. He should be gone till dusk, lunching at whatever village inn he found when he was hungry.

"How splendid to be able to walk all day like that!"

She gave him a frank, measuring glance which seemed to add, "You must be very strong."

"Really? At home even the girls think nothing of it."

She shook her head wistfully.

"I could never do it. Five miles would probably finish me."

Evidently, he did not think less of her on that account; rather, her confession made her different from the girls at home, more interesting than before.

He maintained, however, that a mile in picture-galleries was more exhausting than a dozen on the road. They discussed the city's treasures, all of which he seemed to have by heart. It appeared that he understood Italian; he offered to lend her his copy of Dante in the original. She demurred:

"Before I could read it intelligently you'd surely be gone from Florence."

"There's no telling. I may stop anywhere a week, a month, or more. What old chap was it who said he'd write 'Whim' above his hearth, or something to that effect? I knock about and suit myself."

"It must be wonderful. And you never get lonely?"

"When I do, I toddle home for a while. Drop it, Britches! Come here, sir!"

The dog stopped mumbling Aglaia's fingers, crept to his master, allowed a leather muzzle to be strapped around his nose. Then he scampered into the hall, made the marble vestibule resound with yelps, clawed the front door, reappeared in the parlor, fawned round Aglaia. Catching him

the collar, she kissed him between his gleaming, tawny
s.

"Good-by, Bristles!"

Thoughtfully she returned to her bedroom.

The others were finally dressed in expectation of a visit
; the painting-teacher.

M. Alphonse Zolande was a Parisian in exile, once upon
time a promising young artist resident in Rome, since
n sunk gradually into obscurity. Lean, hollow-cheeked,
thery, dapper in a threadbare sort of way, he was just
ishing half a century in which chagrin had far exceeded
isfaction. His gray mustaches, imperial, and pompa-
ar suggested photographs of the French painter Gérôme.
s restless fingers were stained with nicotine; his vaguely
eminate costume exhaled a strong scent of cigarettes and
pre; in the silver ring on his right thumb the stone was
laced with a daub of sealing-wax.

Since his English was as fragmentary as the Goodchilds'
ench, Mme. von Schwandorf acted as interpreter.

No one could have been more deferential than M. Zo-
de. Sitting gracefully in the parlor — with both feet on
ground so as to hide the worn soles of his pointed,
hly-varnished boots — he showed a touching interest in
allie's aspirations.

He had a studio in Via de' Bardi, across the river Arno.
ere he received "more pupils in winter than at this time
year." One of his patronesses was Princess Tchernitza,
w unfortunately away at some seaside resort. It was
ncess Tchernitza — since one had mentioned her — that
l sent him a young Bulgarian to whom, after a year of
truction, he had been forced to say, "I can teach you
hing more!" That extraordinary youth was now in
razzo, executing a portrait of the new King of Alba-

Mr. Goodchild ventured an inquiry concerning the style of painting favored by M. Zolande.

"But all styles, Monsieur! It is for the intelligent master to permit one's individuality to flourish. No two real artists can be made out of the same mold. One must see for himself, one must choose for himself, one must be himself. It is my affair to show mademoiselle how this one and that one did so and so through the whole history of art; but what method mademoiselle herself will follow is for her to say."

All were sufficiently impressed except Aglaia. When the Goodchild family found themselves alone, she said:

"In my opinion, your Monsieur Zolande is a big bluff."

"Since I'm satisfied with him," retorted Thallie, "it's all that's necessary."

"How is he going to teach you anything, not speaking English better than that?"

"I shall soon understand his French."

"Even so, suppose you find out at last that you've wasted your money and your time?"

"Then I'll come to you and say again I'd rather have studied in Paris."

That day Thallie bought a brand-new painting-outfit. Next morning, escorted by Mr. Goodchild, she presented herself at the studio up four flight of stairs in Via de' Bardi, across the Arno.

In a large room, with plaster walls and a tiled floor, half a dozen kitchen-chairs, and as many battered easels, were set in a semicircle round a model's platform. A Japanese screen stood in the corner beside a divan, and through a half-open door one discerned a coffee-pot on a metal washstand. But one's gaze was arrested by a mammoth canvas portraying, in a smooth and gloomy manner, "The Defeat

of Cyrus by Tamyris, Queen of the Massagetæ." It was a relic of the painting-teacher's optimistic youth.

M. Zolande, a bunch of pansies in his buttonhole, managed to explain that the last of his summer pupils had just departed for the country.

Aurelius persuaded himself that this was fortunate; the master could now give all the more attention to Thalia. And after he had admired the "Defeat of Cyrus," peeped out through the north light, inhaled to the full the studio odors that he loved, he embraced his daughter, with a moist eye, and departed. He was much moved by the thought that Thallie's journey toward celebrity had begun at last in earnest. He was unaware that a European father, for reasons not related to the arts, would have disapproved of this immediate confidence in the Parisian.

M. Zolande, however, was most businesslike. Lighting a fresh cigarette, he examined Thallie's English paints, pear-wood palette, and formidable sheaf of brushes. Then, firmly, he thrust everything underneath the divan. He found a wine-flask, stripped off its straw casing, laid it against an album, demanded that she draw it.

What a humiliating anticlimax to her expectations!

It was all the worse because even at this trivial task she did not suit him. She drew the flask first instead of the spaces visible around it; she paid attention to the outlines rather than to the masses. At last he sat down to sketch the objects in the proper way, and Thallie realized that she did not know how to draw a wine-flask and an album.

Her long labors in Zenasville, despite her father's guidance, had been futile. All that while she had gone on daubing in the uncritical enthusiasm, the blind self-complacency, of those whose work seems good because it is their own. Now her ignorance was revealed, as in a flash of lightning, by the comparison of these two simple studies;

and suddenly the precious future seemed so far removed that she was no longer sure of attaining it.

Her pose relaxed; she stared down at her clasped hands; tears trembled in the corners of her eyes. M. Zolande, looking alarmed, exclaimed:

"But courage, Mademoiselle! One cannot be a Michel-Ange immediately! It is the will to learn that is important. Come, next time we will draw it better."

And over her second sketch he waxed enthusiastic. It appeared that such quick receptiveness as Thallie's was unique in his experience. He even prophesied that in a fortnight she would be painting in full color from a model. Taking heart, she gave him a shy smile of gratitude.

Six days a week, Mr. Goodchild brought her to the studio at nine, and called for her at noon.

She learned that the proportions of an object are best verified by measuring its background, that fore-shortened lines take directions contrary to those one would expect, that high lights are parallel to the sources of illumination. Passing on to monochrome, she found that the medium tone was caught most easily against deep shadows, that all clear colors appeared brighter when surrounded by opaque, that one might successfully repaint light values, but not dark ones. Finally, with oxide of chromium, emerald, cobalt, vermilion, rose madder, and yellow ocher, her palette displayed once more the rainbow hues of promise. And now unconsciously she sat humming at her easel as in Zenasville, even while she had to think of a head only as a set of planes, to distinguish between the flesh of cheek and forehead, to make the shadow of hair look different from the shadow of a nose.

"But Mademoiselle has a colossal sense of color! Only one does not mix raw sienna even with flake white — a century from now the effect would be deplorable."

Every day Mr. Goodchild, wandering through the city, found more delightful things to talk about.

He had purchased a box of water-colors, a portable easel, a camp-chair, a white umbrella. While Thallie labored in the studio, one was likely to see Aurelius in the piazza of the Duomo, all his paraphernalia set up, sketching the bronze doors of the Baptistry. Garlicky loungers leaned over his shoulders, breathed against his neck, and gabbled their criticisms round his ears. He could not help smiling at urchins as fair as Raphael's cherubs, who slyly touched the wet paint with their fingers. Then, eager to gratify at once the ragamuffins who surrounded him, he spoiled his work by too much haste. At last, swarthy young men, approaching with trays of souvenirs, insinuated that everything in Florence had been reproduced already in the form of tinted postcards. Aurelius bought a dozen so as not to hurt the venders' feelings.

He went off to the Uffizi, checked his painting-outfit in the cloak-room, entered the galleries.

The busts of the Roman emperors fascinated him. He was sure that Tiberius had been maligned by history, that Nero, judging from his baby head, would have grown up a good man under favorable circumstances. He fell to dreaming of the Early Empire of Rome, which expanded before him like a chaos of debauchery and hope — all gladiators, senators, centurions, and rose-crowned banqueters, Greek pipes echoing through colonnades, muffled hymns rising from the ground, patricians supine in their marble baths and Christians languishing in dungeons. In fact, the perfect literary picture of those days had never yet been made.

Lifting his bushy beard of red and gray, fixing his large, sunken eyes intently on the mural arabesques, he asked himself:

"Why should it not be I?"

But he was still busy with his tragic poem of *Fiammetta* and *Rodolfo*.

It began as follows:

Where runs the Arno through the heart of Florence-town,
And out of palace windows beauty still looks down,
In Fourteen ninety-four, or somewhere thereabouts,
A damsel from her casement gazed with anguished doubts:
Along the Ponte Vecchio she could not espy
The object of her maidenly esteem draw nigh.
"Just Heav'n," she faintly cried. "If that foul Medici band
Has laid Rodolfo low with an assassin's hand!"

Aurelius, while priding himself on having developed suspense in the first dozen lines, was distressed because his thoughts lost half their richness when confined by verse. Possibly the meter was at fault. He tried another:

Fair Fiammetta leaned from her casement beside the swift Arno,
High in the palace of the old duke, her intolerant father,
Duke of Rodano, leader of warriors, and Medici courtier —

Too much like Longfellow!

Aurelius sometimes wrote his verses at a table of the Café Hirsch, in the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele. It was a resort of painters, sculptors, journalists, where every known artistic periodical seemed to be on file, and where a *demi-tasse* of coffee cost four cents.

An awning shaded the tables on the sidewalk, but did not darken the interior. Here one might sit in comfort by the hour, gazing out through the plate-glass windows at the square, or watching the patrons come and go, their heads reflected in mirrors that ran round the walls. Aurelius soon learned to covet a particular corner. His waiter was a German-Swiss named Otto.

Short, fat, with glistening bald head and ruddy jowls, Otto made one wonder how a man with features all designed for jollity could look so woebegone. At first glance, one took the perspiration on his cheeks for tears.

He spoke English.

"Black coffee, Otto, if you please."

"Black coffee," moaned Otto, and dragged his heels across the floor to the buffet. Returning, he laid down the tin tray, with its cup and saucer, battered pot and sugar-holder, like one who relinquishes his last poor treasure at the order of a cruel conqueror.

"What a day, Otto!"

"Ah!" A groan of despair.

"The sun of Italy on Italy's monuments!"

"Ugh! Italy *und* her monuments, Mr. Gootschild! I can wish I have never seen them. Yes, I wish I have never been alive!"

And finally he told his tale.

He had begun as omnibus in a hotel-pension at Vitznau, had spent two years as waiter in a London chop-house, had fallen heir to three thousand francs, regained Switzerland, married, opened a tea-room on the road to Arth. His passion had been to own, on Lake Lucerne, such a hotel as is honored with a star by Baedeker, motor-cars before the terrace, a string-band playing in the winter-garden, *soirées de gala* every Thursday night. But luck had been against him. His wife dying, he had gone bankrupt. Long service in neighboring countries had failed to yield sufficient capital to start again. Drifting to Italy, now he was carrying pots of coffee, at four cents each, to patrons of the Café Hirsch. Nevertheless, he felt that he had been cheated of his proper destiny. Off duty, he passed the doors of fine *hostelries* with the sensations of a man who watches interlopers flourishing in a mansion that he should have inherited.

Mr. Goodchild cast about for words of comfort.

"My dear friend, all your troubles seem to come from wanting something you are not sure would make you happy. As Epictetus said, 'It is not poverty that causes sorrow, but covetous desires; nor do riches deliver from fear, but reasoning. If, therefore, you acquire a habit of reasoning, you will neither desire riches nor complain of poverty.'"

"Ha! All very nice, Mr. Gootschild, for them who has no ambitions! But me!" Otto thumped the coffee-stained plastron of his livery. "Me, who feels in here so sure, if I had got a chance already, I would be great in my profession! Always it eats me up, that feeling. I might have turned away millionaires in the high season; yet all I must do is to get penny tips from artists!"

Aurelius could not help sympathizing with fine dreams in whatever form.

"It's true," he responded gently, "that fate seems to have been cruel to your aspirations. But have faith! Here or hereafter, we shall all rise to our ideals. Besides, the sky is often darkest just before the sun breaks through. Take my own case."

He described the coming of the legacy which had so changed his life and the lives of his three daughters.

When he pronounced the words, "a hundred thousand dollars," the other stared as if seeing him then for the first time. That day the waiter's farewell bow was more profound than previously. From the threshold of the café, Otto watched the tall figure in the rusty cutaway clear across the square. Four cab-horses stood in line before the arcade. Mr. Goodchild fed to each a lump of sugar—the four pieces which had been served him with his coffee.

He arrived at the pension toward dinner-time. Frossie and Thallie had not yet returned from the churches and

the lace-shops. But Aglaia, as fresh as a flower in her evening gown, sat under a palmetto palm, deciphering Dante in the original, and, without seeming to do so, watching the glass corridor.

Cyril Bellegram usually regained the pension at this hour.

Bristles, tongue dangling, pattered into the garden and put his dusty fore-paws on Aglaia's lap. Cyril drew up a chair, refilled his pipe, related the adventures of the day. But, at the first bell, he rose and lounged away to dress for dinner.

His table in the dining-room was near the Goodchilds'. One could observe him holding his knife like a pen, separating his fish with fork and crust, raising a wine-glass with his little finger extended. Besides, Aglaia found him even more distinguished-looking in a dinner-jacket.

After dinner, Aurelius frequently withdrew to polish his verses, and Frossie to reshape some episode in her novel. Aglaia soon let Thallie understand that three was a crowd.

But Cyril Bellegram had not yet outgrown the age that finds a delicate suggestion of maturity more charming than ingenuousness.

In the moonlit garden, where fireflies twinkled through the foliage and blossoms spread a stronger perfume than by day, he and Aglaia had come to consider the bench beneath the palmetto palm as theirs alone, by right of nightly use. Here it was that she, with the shadows lending to her visage a lovely ambiguity, drew from him confessions never made before — of youthful dreams which he had forgotten till now, of fancies that come to one in solitude, of the inclinations lying deep in the heart, that direct the whole seemingly erratic progress of a life. What he did not disclose she managed to guess.

His father was a baronet; he had been to Oxford; he was

now an idler. Still, he felt at times a strong desire to do something that might bring him fame, yet not be unseemly in an English gentleman.

He could write Latin poetry, draw horses and dogs, play the piano, speak Italian, French, and German, ride, shoot, fence, dance, mix a punch, name the popes and the kings of Europe backward. In his opinion, these accomplishments fitted him for nothing but the diplomatic service.

"Why don't you!" exclaimed Aglaia.

She saw the staircases of royal palaces, lined with lackeys, giving upon vast halls, where the wives of attachés, themselves attired like queens, made deep courtesies before a throne. She saw ball-rooms full of epaulets and jewels, a monarch halting to pay compliments that would thenceforth distinguish one from all the rest. She saw a shaded lamp above a desk inlaid with tortoise-shell, a despatch-box opened by a confiding husband, papers embellished with broad seals—the secret treaty, the cipher code, the ultimatum. For there were women who attained such moments, who held at their tongues' ends the secrets of a nation.

Nevertheless, she said softly:

"What you need is an incentive, an inspiration."

The moon floated free of clouds. From a dark window above, Thallie saw Aglaia lean forward, shake her head reproachfully, and stare into Cyril Bellegram's eyes with sisterly concern.

Thallie, entering the adjoining room, approached Euphrosyne's writing-table. When she had glanced furtively at Mr. Goodchild's door, she asked in low tones:

"Do you suppose that Aggie's gone on Mr. Bellegram?"

Frossie looked up through her eyeglasses with a puckered brow.

"Anxious to marry him, you mean?"

"Being gone on a person would naturally mean that."

Euphrosyne, her thumb between the pages of the dictionary, reflected:

"They have got pretty thick! But who knows, since she never discusses him with us?"

"All the more reason for suspecting in Aglaia's case."

"That's true."

They stared at each other, lips compressed, eyes showing, if not jealousy, at least a hint of envy. For Thallie thought, "So simply!" and Euphrosyne, "As soon as this!" The latter said:

"Well, if he should prove to be the one, I'm glad that chance has let them meet right now. Sometimes, I suppose, one never really finds the right one, not even in a lifetime."

"Or one finds him only to lose him," Thallie amended, drooping again at recollection. "But she was always the luckiest! Remember, it was Aggie who picked up the wedding-ring in Maple Lane, that nobody claimed even when dad advertized it in the 'Zenasville Recorder.' And in grab-bags, at the meetings of the Mite Society, it was she who always got the doll dressed to represent a bride, or something like that."

"Her horoscope has Venus in the First House."

"Not that I'd want a Mr. Bellegram," Thallie asserted disdainfully. "If I should marry, he'd have to be American."

"How can one tell until the time comes?"

"Or whether we'll ever get the chance?"

"O Thallie! You, with your looks!"

"My looks! A lot of good they've done me so far."

Tears filled her eyes; she turned away.

After a while, Euphrosyne resumed her writing.

She was finishing the third chapter of her novel. Her

heroine, the exquisite *Henriette des Champsvermeils*, had just told her Catholic suitor — the best swordsman in all France — that she could not listen to his plea till he became a Huguenot. The chapter, in fact, was headed, "Rome or My Lady?" and the closing passage ran:

The *Sieur du Brassignac* turned from the casement and bestowed on me a look of tender reproach. "If I did not know you to be nobler than an angel," he was so kind as to exclaim in quivering accents, "I might call you temptress of my soul! Why, this John Calvin, by whose arts, and the ill-advised Edict of Nantes —" "Treason!" came a horrendous shout from behind the arras, and there rushed into the inn-parlor a frightful figure, in a purple pour-point and a black mask, brandishing a naked sword. "*Ventre Saint-Gris!*" mocked Du Brassignac, with a debonair laugh, as he whipped out his gleaming rapier. "If I mistake not, it is only the *Sieur de Nontignelles* once more!" The two blades clashed; but my fainting senses warned me of a frantic clatter of hoofs, approaching on the highway, from the direction of Paris.

Frossie's present intention was to convert the *Sieur du Brassignac* as soon as possible, involve the lovers in the religious persecutions of Louis XIII, and exile them together, perhaps in the Americas. She was no longer in perfect sympathy with France. Her next novel was going to be laid in Florence, round Dante's time.

It might be a good plan to take as heroine a daughter of poor but respectable parents living in one of those old houses near Via San Martino, and let her fall in love with no one grander than a talented young goldsmith. For could one, after all, be sure how great ladies and titled gentlemen behaved to-day, much less some centuries ago?

Frossie was at least a good enough self-critic to perceive that *Henriette des Champsvermeils* and *Raoul du Brassignac* were scarcely more lifelike than a pair of marionettes. The remedy was this: a writer should portray the things she had experienced herself.

But in that case how was Frossie going to write love-stories?

She was shocked by George Sand's device of forming new attachments every little while, in order to refresh her inspiration; all the same, a romantic life ought to do wonders for one's work. Yet what emotional expansion did the Pension Schwandorf promise her?

There life had already been reduced to a peaceful monotone. Every morning, in answer to their ring, the maid, Giannina, wearing the same smile, brought into Aglaia's bedroom the tray of rolls and coffee. She was a stocky, strong-looking woman, prematurely past her youth, with sallow skin, large, mischievous black eyes, and the mouth of a comedian. Her husband was Federico, the middle-aged waiter whose long, smooth-shaven face would have looked more at home beneath the Jolly Roger than in a dining-room. It was Federico who served their formal meals, arrayed in a dress-suit of antiquated pattern, and white cotton gloves.

Even the foods, over which one had exclaimed at first, began to lose their tang. The *minestrone*, the *polenta*, the *risotto*, the *zuppa inglese*, were just like other dishes now. The Goodchilds asked one another if the table was n't failing.

But now they would have missed intensely the roses of the garden, the bizarre chair-covers in their rooms, the amiable greetings of the servants, even the calls of the vegetable-hucksters, that woke them every morning. Sometimes they said, "It's a disgrace that we have n't run off for a few days to Rome or Perugia or Siena!" Yet they kept postponing even the least arduous of those excursions, so well were they imbued already with the inertia of Italy in summer, and with the feeling that the Pension Schwandorf was every day more like a home.

That was the season for the "caravans"—the tourist parties, personally conducted, that raced across Europe on a schedule. Every little while the pension was possessed by a fresh crowd, that arrived at strange hours, breakfasted in haste, disappeared for the day, returned at nightfall with a dizzy look, and dined in exhaustion. But next morning the frailest of these passengers was mysteriously revived. Once more they all drove off for their sight-seeing in a string of carriages; and none could boast afterward of having viewed a single tower, tomb, or cloister which another had missed.

In the evening, while they sat in limp attitudes about the hall, girls from Charleston, Seattle, Mobile, Kansas City, complained to the three Graces that the Florentine young men were awful. One maiden, losing her companions, had been followed by a grinning booby with heels two inches high. Another, falling behind the rest, had been pinched on the arm by a jackanapes who certainly wore corsets underneath his coat.

"What did you do?"

"I just naturally hit him over the head with my hand-bag. And I had my guide-book in it, and my trunk-keys, and that silver purse I bought across the river, and a bottle of cholera pills, and about three francs in coppers."

"Good for the U. S. A.! I'll bet he won't pinch another of us in a hurry!"

But the trouble was that there seemed to be a flirtatious youth on every corner.

Aglaia had a way of calmly looking them all over. Thallie escaped by walking fast, her neck bent, to hide her blushes. Euphrosyne was harassed less often than her sisters. She learned to walk through Via Tornabuoni, straight past the Nobles' Club, with perfect self-possession.

Toward mid-afternoon, the doorway of the Nobles' Club

was graced with half a dozen spick-and-span young men. Among them one often saw some army officers. The latter wore tight blue-black jackets, with magenta collars and cuffs, light gray trousers, black caps with patent-leather vizors, swords caught up by the hilt in the crook of the left arm. Occasionally they appeared in brazen helmets, the cross of Savoy emblazoned on the front. They belonged to the Magenta Cavalry, a regiment of lancers.

One day, when Frossie passed alone, just one of them was lounging in the doorway. She stole a glance at him.

Of her own height, with the lean figure of an athlete, he seemed about twenty-eight years old. His skin was of a creamy pallor. Small black mustaches were brushed straight up from his lips. His eyes reminded one of inkwells, with the sunlight shining into them. His hand poised a cigarette half-way to his mouth; his face of a young knight in a fourteenth-century fresco displayed a look of homage startling in its intensity.

Frossie's knees grew weak. No one had ever looked at her like that!

She found herself a block away, proceeding as sedately as before, but trembling all over. Mechanically she turned into the Lungarno, which extended northward, beside the river, toward the pension.

Why had he given her such a look, so passionate, yet so respectful? It was not the stare of a flirter, but of one who took a serious, almost solemn, interest in her. It was not the expression of a stranger, but rather of one who had seen her many times, had thought about her still more often. Of course that was impossible.

Farther on, she paused, pretended to contemplate a showcase, glanced behind her. He was there, two hundred feet away, slowly sauntering now, and gazing innocently at the sky.

She felt frightened, then furious. "And I thought that he at least looked decent!" She marched all the way home without once turning her head. But, safe in the pension, she peeped out through the curtains of the parlor window.

From the opposite corner he rapidly scrutinized the house. Then, wheeling, he departed with a quick, lithe stride.

That night, in her dreams Frossie tramped innumerable miles of streets,—through Florence, Milan, Geneva, Paris, New York, Zenasville,—all the while aware that his eyes were focused, like twin burning-glasses, on her back. Or was it the rays reflected from the silvered buttons of his tight blue-black coat, as if from a double row of tiny search-lights?

If only he had n't worn them!

CHAPTER SIX

A TOUCH OF THE SUN IN VIA TORNABUONI

FOR a week Frossie avoided the neighborhood of the Nobles' Club. Even at the pension door she looked round her nervously. But at last, as her expectancy died away, she was aware of losing a certain stimulation. Life suddenly seemed so humdrum, her work so futile! One night, on impulse, she jumped out of bed and tore up her manuscript. When Thallie woke at the sound, she explained:

"It would never have been a success. Perhaps I was n't meant to succeed in literature or anything else."

"What wicked nonsense!"

"Never mind, Babykins. Go to sleep and forget it."

Euphrosyne had long been used to seeing admiration pass her by for Aglaia and Thallie. She had long believed that her time for romance would not come till the others were married, since simple flowers, that seem charming when viewed by themselves, may lose attractiveness if flanked by more vivid blossoms. But now a young man's expressive eyes had appeared to say, "There is something about you that I have n't seen before, something so congenial to me that I must know who you are." It was hard for Frossie to give up that sensation of pride, to feel she had been mistaken.

"His idea of killing time on a dull afternoon! And still, he seemed different from the rest."

The worst of it was that he had seemed different from the rest.

She scorned herself for having remembered his creamy pallor, his crisp, black hair, his muscular hand, his lithe figure. How had she ever noticed so much in a second's glance? Undoubtedly, the novelist's eye for details. She might use him in her new book, rather to his disadvantage. She might make him the goldsmith's rival, a Ghibelline knight, courageous, perhaps, but heartless — in short, unworthy of the heroine's love.

Every morning Frossie sat down to work at nine o'clock sharp. She put on her horn spectacles, spread a sheet of paper, and poised her fountain-pen. Then for a long while she stared across the old writing-table, out of the open window, at the palmetto palm. Giannina, the maid, passing through to Aglaia's room for the breakfast-tray, made a grimace of pity, and cried in her loud, hoarse voice:

"Always studying, Signorina! It's not good for the young to labor so hard."

"Better to labor than to think idle thoughts."

For Frossie was rapidly learning to speak Italian.

In the cool of the afternoon she often went out exhausted by a long day of vain effort. She wandered down into the city. One day, in the English circulating library, while looking over the catalogue, she read:

"'The Six Cæsars,' six vols., John Holland, author of 'Primitive Latin Religions,' 'Roman Literature,' 'Mycenæan Excavations,' 'Baal, Dionysus and Mars,' etc."

So John Holland was a historian.

She took home a volume of "The Six Cæsars" and showed it to Mme. von Schwandorf. The latter, in her office-boudoir beside the vestibule, was sitting at ease, her yellow frizzes neatly arranged, her wrinkled face well powdered, her ample form arrayed in a mauve satin house-gown garnished all over with lace.

"Ah, yes, my dear. What a thorough, brilliant, valuable

work that is! I've always meant to read it. But at my age, you know, one falls asleep less quickly when Pierre Louys is describing the ancients — for instance, in 'Aphrodite.' ”

Madame threw her cigarette out of the window, laid down a yellow-backed novel entitled “*Histoire Comique*,” and put the Florentine poodle off her lap. With her points of lace all scattering bergamot, she crossed to a book-shelf which held a long row of ponderous volumes.

“Behold! They're all here, including the one that captured the Nobel Prize. Now, you are young and strong; you shall read them from cover to cover, and tell me what they contain. I have made my door-porter, Domenico, cut all the pages. It's always best that the pages be cut, at least, in the books of our friends. Eh, little book-worm?”

She questioned Frossie satirically with her keen old eyes.

“I'm afraid I shall have too much work of my own to do.”

“And I am afraid you'll never find time to play. But wait till the autumn! I'll see to it then that you play. Only yesterday, when I drove to church, three friends of mine stormed the carriage to ask when the dances are going to begin again at the Pension Schwandorf. Three young men as dashing as ever you saw in your life, and all aristocratic enough for even a stanch little democrat! In fact, the Magenta Cavalry gets all its officers from the aristocracy.” She cackled craftily at her thoughts. “Your work, indeed! I'll settle your work for you, Mademoiselle de Staël!”

Next day, while she and Aglaia were strolling far from the Nobles' Club, Frossie met him again, face to face.

Though she looked away at once, she felt that she had turned pale. This fault, however, was instantly remedied by a burning blush. Staring before her, she marched on

faster and faster, while tears of mortification filled her eyes. Aglaia, who was wearing new shoes, inquired:

"Are we catching a train?"

"That officer back there."

"That whipper-snapper in the tight little coat? If I bothered about every insect like him!"

Frossie pressed her lips together, then uttered coldly:

"I only suspected he might try flirting with you."

"Well, what if he did? I don't think he'll try it again."

"I suppose he gave you a long, solemn look, as much as to say, 'Oh, how I respect you!'"

"You evidently saw him at work."

"Not to-day," Frossie shot forth. "He's tried it even on me when I've been alone."

"Then perhaps that dying-calf expression was meant for you this time, too."

"Hardly, with you along."

They returned to the pension in silence. There they found Cyril Bellegram sitting with Bristles beneath the palmetto palm. His boots were dusty, his jacket was rumpled, his black forelock tumbled over his brow; but still the rascal managed to look distinguished. His face, too finely drawn,—that sharp-featured face of some neurotic young emperor on a Roman coin,—wore a frown of impatience and boredom. His walks in the country were shorter every day. It was he who now came first to that trysting-place, where Aglaia plucked a rose for his coat-lapel and fed chocoletes to Bristles.

Through those languorous afternoons and soft evenings Aglaia had studied Cyril Bellegram with care. Against his faults she had set out his talents, had finally asked herself, "Could I overcome the defects, and bring out the virtues, sufficiently to make such a venture pay?"

He was indolent, irresolute, deferential. Yet he woke

to vigor at the call of amusement. He was stubborn beyond belief at certain points, and his air of modesty, as is often the case, concealed an egotism greater than that which is openly shown by less complex men. The fact is, Cyril Bellegram had somehow got in his nature a generous share of temperament. Aglaia had not expected to find her first Englishman high-strung and sentimental.

"One could use the sentimentality first," she reflected, "and the rest in its turn." For now Aglaia was picturing herself as a diplomatist's wife.

She wrote to London for books on the British diplomatic service — its special requirements, its scheme of appointments, its politics. Meanwhile she drew from Cyril some hints about his relatives at home. The brother of his uncle's wife was ensconced in the Foreign Office. It looked like fate.

Yet the future might easily offer a better marriage — and one more favorable to her operatic career? When she had peered long and earnestly in the mirror, she snapped her fingers at her thirty years. After all, if she wished, she could safely wait a while longer.

Indeed, she had never looked so alluring as now. Her emerald eyes were more brilliant; her fair skin seemed well-nigh luminous; her copper-colored tresses had taken on a fresh luster. When she entered the garden, her slender body undulated at every step. When she picked a flower, her gesture was a poem of blended grace and decision. When she turned her small, drooping head, her profile, against the leaves, was like a cameo. She appeared to be a new creature, whose secret intentions were reinforced from deep reservoirs of attractiveness, hitherto unknown.

In the evening, when she leaned back on the bench beneath the palmetto palm, the odor of mignonette from her

own seemed mingled with an incorporeal sweetness, as though from the shadows were stealing forth invisible ministers to her will. They slipped close, with sinuous movements. They uttered round the silent young man such sighs as might perfume dim places full of rose-leaves, where golden dishes gleamed on purple cushions, and cups of enchantment pulsed in answer to the last note of a lute. The air of the Southern night passed over his face, like caresses that one longs to feel apart from a dream. He had a sensation of eagerness and terror. But, as he hesitated, Aglaia said in an ordinary tone:

"Come, let me tell your fortune."

She took his cold hand in hers, turned it up to the starlight, leaned forward. Her breath passed over his palm. He smiled thoughtfully, as if nothing had happened.

"Your fingers are lean, with rounded tips. That denotes simple tastes, a quick mind, mixed talents. But this thumb is not energetic: you'll have to be urged, it seems. Your palm is long and thin. You are guided by the ideal, the sublime, the soul; you desire high conquests. But here lack of motive power again, unless something comes along to arouse you. There, down the palm, are gifts and good

The line of fortune shows success, but only from the most endeavor. Under the little finger I see political intrigues, under the first, diplomacy." She looked closer, stropped his hand, with the words, "Your heart line is far more than a chain of flirtations! Never!"

Flirtations, flirtations, flirtations! Which reminds me of a dozen pages of music to read to-night." Softly, she rose to her feet. From the doorway of the corridor she called back to him in Italian, "Good good repose, Don Juan!"

Night, with the score of "Thaïs" spread out on

her lap, she saw once more the great ladies of Paris receiving, in their theater-boxes, a homage not paid to the women on the stage. At the opera, to be sure, the aristocrats rose to the singers, split their white gloves in applause, tossed down their bouquets. But how was it when prima donnas came into their homes to make music? When invitations to very exclusive functions were being prepared? When the son and heir broke the news that he had proposed to an "artist"? Also, it appeared, an ambassador often drove through streets lined with troops, in a gilded coach with footmen, postilions, and outriders, a plumed chapeau on his head, diamond orders all over his chest, and his wife, in tiara and low corsage, by his side. But one could hardly insert such splendors between two rehearsals of "Tosca"!

On the other hand, Adelina Patti was probably richer than most ambassadors. Even Mme. Linkow earned fifty thousand dollars a year, while half a dozen sopranos attained the six figures. In ten or twelve years, at that rate, one could be a millionaire.

Also, in recompense for an ambassadorial coach, the populace with torches and shouts would unhitch the horses and draw one's carriage themselves. The only trouble was that Aglaia would probably be in a limousine.

At times, her bohemianism awoke with a start; and all at once her social ambitions seemed petty. With a pang like hunger she longed for the dim, dusty stage that she had so often imagined, the singers lounging forward in street-clothes, the violin bows all rising together, rich voices lost at last in the gloom of the galleries. Or else, she imagined a dressing-room blazing with lights, a maid at her feet, a call at the door, the summoning murmur of wood and wind, like the sound of a distant storm. Once more she felt her old exaltation at thought of the great auditorium, silent in every corner when she parted her lips.

Then, suddenly, she longed to be loved by thousands, to give a multitude happiness, to afford countless hearts a vision of beauty that they had not known before. Pensive, softened, Aglaia saw herself condescending to pour out her voice in the shabby squares of slums, in hospital wards. The afflicted should adore her; their blessings would follow her, and something of her presence would always remain with them, like the strange beneficence of a saint. In future days, touching reminiscences would be told about her. Jenny Lind, having given away a fortune, had wanted no more than "potatoes and herring, a clean wooden chair, a wooden spoon, milk-soup." Christine Nilsson had always kept on her dressing-table the pictures of her parents in peasant-costume. Tetrizzini had stopped a theater panic by singing a few cadenzas, and Geraldine Farrar, with a simple song in a prison, had made the most brutal convict weep like a child. Never mind: they should tell such stories about Aglaia, some day! Then, answering the notes of ambitious young girls, she would write very gently that one had much better seek happiness in the home. In time she might sing only oratorios?

These moods soon passed. Aglaia, as she herself would have phrased it, never had both feet off the ground for long.

One morning Mme. von Schwandorf told her that Valentino Mughetto, the singing-teacher, was back from Montecatini. That same day Aglaia presented herself at his house, in the other end of town, near the English graveyard.

A man-servant, wearing a yellow-striped waistcoat, ushered her into a parlor shaded against the sun, floored with mosaic, where pieces of old brocade were stretched on the walls. For ten minutes she gazed at the Donatello bust on the mantel-shelf, the six antique chairs with raveled coats

of arms on their plush, the bunch of peonies in the majolica vase. A Maltese cat appeared, examined her scornfully, stuck his claws in the table-cloth fringe, ran under a chair. Aglaia perceived in the doorway a big man with the figure of a half-deflated balloon, with a ruddy, pear-shaped face, a hooked nose, and a curly beard, dyed black, spread over his coat-lapels like a fan. From his small, keen eyes there leaped forth at her a glance which seemed, in an instant, to scan her from head to foot, appraise her attire, her body, her thoughts, and penetrate to the inmost recess of her heart. But immediately a conventional smile appeared on his lips.

She said:

"I've come to take lessons."

He cleared his throat, with a rumble thrown back by the walls like a peal of thunder.

"Why?"

"I wish to become a dramatic soprano."

"Indeed? You sound like a contralto to me."

"A contralto! Impossible! I've always sung soprano."

"In that case you've probably ruined your voice. Step into the music-room."

With a sensation of fright she entered the adjoining apartment, a yellow chamber bare except for a black piano-forte, a stool, and a chair. Through the lattices of four French windows one saw a gay flower-garden ablaze in the sunlight.

Valentino Mughetto let down his balloon-like shape upon the piano-stool, spread his hands on the keys, and stared into space.

"Sing something."

She lowered her head till the pounding of her heart had abated; then, straightening her slender form, she announced defiantly:

"The 'Vissi d'arte' from 'Tosca.'"

The barest hint of a grin crossed his face.

"All right."

He struck the keys. She sang. In ten seconds he stopped, shrugged his shoulders, remarked:

"A contralto, badly damaged."

Aglaia stood motionless, gazing at him in horror.

"Sit down, Signorina," he suggested in kinder tones. And when she had sunk into the chair, the maestro explained.

Her ambition, or bad advice, had ignored the facts in her case. All this while she had forced a contralto voice to sing the soprano register till it had grown so scratchy and thin that there was small chance of restoring it. "Unless, young lady, you put yourself faithfully into my hands."

"But — a contralto!"

Gone all the visions of Aglaia as *Tosca*, as *Madama Butterfly*, as *Marguerite*, *Elizabeth*, and *Isolde*! He smiled like an old philosopher who hears for the thousandth time a childish complaint.

"Tell me, then, what is shameful about a contralto voice? Bessie Palmer had one. Marianne Brandt had one. Schumann-Heink has one. But, understand, I've not promised that you will ever become like them. All else aside, one does n't become a Schumann-Heink without owning a great big heart. For all I know, you may have no more heart than rib-space. Why, in Heaven's name, do all you young women sink your chests, and stick out your stomachs, and breathe with the top half-inch of your lungs? What have you got, after all these years of such poses, to force a long, steady column of air up through the vocal chords? Besides, let me look down your throat." He thrust a laryngoscope into her mouth. His comment was:

"The formation itself is not so bad. You smoke cigarettes? Never? Then your accursed soprano practice has made all this chronic irritation."

He advanced his ruddy face, which seemed to her, with its fan-shaped beard and nose like a beak, as terrible as the visage of an Assyrian despot pronouncing a sentence of death. He rumbled:

"At this moment you think: 'He is mad. I will go to some other man, who'll say that my voice is soprano.' Hark to this, Signorina! In Italy are hundreds of teachers who will, for the sake of the money, tell you whatever you wish to hear. Only I promise you that five years hence they will have killed your last note. Now, then, if you choose to rely on me, you will not sing so much as a scale for three months, or even speak in loud tones. At the end of that time, if you return to this room, I'll tell you whether or not your voice can be saved."

Her limbs were weak as she rose from the chair to go.

"In three months," she gasped.

"At your service, Signorina — if you obey my orders."

She returned to the pension on feet that seemed weighted with lead. When she entered her room, she saw Mr. Goodchild, stripped to his shirt-sleeves, beaming with pride, and striking an attitude of burlesque triumph beside a brand-new piano. The instrument had appeared that morning the moment Aglaia was clear of the pension. It was his gift on the eve of her great career, a surprise that had given him anticipatory delights for a month. Aurelius had even rummaged his trunk for the tools of an abandoned vocation, and, in a frenzy of haste, had tuned several keys afresh.

For the first time in many years Aglaia stifled a sob on her father's breast.

The rest received her news in a blaze of revolt. She a contralto? That Greek, in the train, had been right about

Valentino Mughetto: he must indeed be a charlatan, an ignoramus, an imbecile. But presently they remembered a time when her voice had seemed purer. Such things had happened before. Mr. Goodchild could not help recalling a similar case, an anecdote from the life of Manuel Garcia.

Again he took his pale daughter into his arms.

"My dear, in a moment like this one sees the true value of optimism." He quoted in trembling accents from his favorite sage: "'What's to be done? Make the best of what's in our power, and take the rest as it happens. And how is that? As it pleases God.' Come, now, as Mr. Mughetto suggested, you wouldn't mind a future like Schumann-Heink's? Who knows that you won't make contralto singing the rage? Composers, when they've heard you, may start to write all their main rôles for contraltos! Think what it would be to revolutionize the whole operatic world!"

"Poor old dad! And if my voice is gone?"

"Gone!"

A unanimous hoot of derision.

But all agreed that the new piano had better stay locked for three months.

One day soon afterward, Aurelius, in the Café Hirsch, read that Mme. Bertha Linkow, with other songbirds, was visiting Montecatini, scarcely two hours away.

Here was his chance. He would go to Montecatini, find Mme. Linkow, ask her whether Mughetto was to be trusted. Better still, he would take Aglaia along, in order that the famous singer herself might give an opinion. But wait: suppose the prima donna, not so far-seeing as Valentino Mughetto, should say, "My poor child, I can give you no hope." At last, he was even afraid to tell his daughters that she was at Montecatini.

Aurelius found it hard to be secretive. Whenever the girls spoke of Mme. Linkow, his conscience smote him, as if his silence constituted a lie. Then, too, he was troubled because that amiable celebrity was so near, yet so far. By her aid he had come into contact with the fair world that he should have liked to inhabit.

Well, he might enter those regions yet; his tragedy of *Rodolfo* and *Fiammetta* would make a perfect libretto.

On his walks through Florence he had not failed to discover some theaters. One, behind the Palazzo Vecchio, was called the Folies-Bergère. Another, out by the cavalry barracks, was named the Alhambra. Both seemed given up to variety shows; yet he passed them with the same excitement that he had felt in his youth while viewing through a shabby doorway the world of behind the scenes. Their lobbies were plastered with gaudy signs — of saturnine gentlemen taking rabbits out of glass bowls, of acrobats forming a pyramid, of dancing-women attired like odalisks. Before the Folies-Bergère, the largest sign portrayed a languishing brunette in a bersagliere hat and a spangled skirt, with the legend:

Prossima! Prossima! Prossima!

L'incomparabile

NELLA TESORE!

Stella Internazionale!!!

Why not bring the girls to see the magician, the acrobats, the odalisks, and this "incomparable Nella Tesore, the International Star"?

Walking on, he recalled the Saturday night theatricals in Zenasville, Selina Inchkin, Ira, the hardware merchant, and Dr. Numble. Suppose, after all, there was something in the Doctor's idea of reincarnation? Aurelius, with his love of the theater, might have been, in some previous life,

a famous actor, like Roscius or Molière? But was such a belief respectable in a good Christian? Certainly there was no such thing in the Bible!

"Hold on; let's see about that! If the Pentateuch has allusions known only to cabalists the whole Book may contain other cryptical meanings. In Ezra and Nehemiah the reconstruction of the temple might be significant? What do Jeremiah's and Zepaniah's oracles really allude to? On the other hand, St. Paul makes it plain that the resurrection is not to be material. And then, reverting to Solomon, there's the third chapter, twenty-second verse, of Ecclesiastes. But the modern idea is that Solomon did n't write the Ecclesiastes! Has n't somebody even argued that the Epistle of James is a Jewish work, and not a Christian at all?"

Aurelius began to feel dizzy. Perhaps one should n't walk too long in the Florentine sun. He entered a church, gloomy, deliciously cool, sweet with stale incense. He hired a chair for a penny, sat down with a sigh, stared vacantly at the frescoes round the high-altar, where floated holy groups in quaint poses of adoration.

No, it was necessary to think of a heaven where she whom he had lost would be waiting for him, her dear presence recognizable from afar. Why, in a universe of different scheme, say in the future state of theosophists, one might learn at the meeting-place of souls that she had gone back to earth, to begin again with strangers, to find another mate! Oh, monstrous thought, as monstrous as if he had been tempted to choose a second wife. Besides, to have lived many lives would mean to have loved before. He chose rather to believe that he and she had come uncontaminated by any previous love to their perfect union, which presently should be resumed for all time.

He lowered his pallid eyelids. Little by little his bushy

beard descended upon his coat. His dome-like brow sank forward. His hands were relaxed on his knees.

At sundown, a sound of chanting woke him. Candle-flames clustered round the altar; a radiance enveloped the priest who, in his gold-stitched vestments, was bowing, rising, bowing. Aurelius, his shoulders more stooped than ever, walked slowly home, with the thought, "Perhaps I shall have to follow the Florentines' example and take my daily siesta?"

He peered into the pension parlor. An interesting sight met his gaze.

Beside the piano stood Frossie, hatted, just in from her outing, her figure stiffly drawn up, a dazed look on her face. Before her bowed a handsome cavalry officer, of a creamy pallor, with crisp black hair and short mustaches brushed straight up from his lips. Beside these two hovered Mme. von Schwandorf, completing the introduction. Her eyes, beneath the yellow frizzes, glistened with relish; her wrinkled mouth displayed its most mischievous smile. Then she saw Aurelius in the doorway.

"Mr. Goodchild, permit me! Lieutenant Olivuzzi, of the Cavalry of Magenta. I had his mama's acquaintance when she was a little marchesina in pinafores, and used to visit the Buondelcampi, to whom I was governess. So this good boy sometimes comes to bring an old woman a message, and stays for a cup of tea. Just now, while he was telling me how he admires America, in walks a certain young lady who knows more than I about skyscrapers and cowboys. In revenge, she shall make him relate the war in Libya. You notice these two little ribbons on his coat?"

Lieutenant Olivuzzi protested:

"Ah, Madama Svandorp!"

"Tut, tut! The blue-and-crimson one is given for Trip-

oli service, the plain blue for valor. Nevertheless, you see, he's still modest."

In fact, his clear skin was suffused with a blush. His large black eyes expressed a reproach that seemed genuine. Then he knitted his brows, stiffened his face, stared down at his sword-hilt. But abruptly raising his eyes, he caught Euphrosyne's glance, which said, "What a boy you are, after all!" Her gaze flinched from his face, for an instant clung to the blue and red ribbons on his coat, then plunged into space. Between the ebony what-not and the brass plaque from Benares, Frossie discerned yellow sands, bursting bombshells, the dust of a savage melley, a young lieutenant in pearl-gray trousers and tight blue-black jacket driving his sword through the heart of a dervish.

Her father was saying, with stately courtesy:

"It's a great pleasure, Lieutenant, to meet the Italian army. Your traditions, you know, are very much like our own: the struggle for liberty, Garibaldi, Cavour, and so on. I presume you speak English, sir?"

"A lit-tle, sir," Lieutenant Olivuzzi replied in a clear, soft voice. "I spick—" He frowned anxiously; then his face lighted up—"I read, yes; I lis-ten, yes: but spick?" He shrugged his shoulders, spread out his hands, raised his eyes, made a mouth of humorous helplessness.

"He is really very well grounded," purred Mme. von Schwandorf, "but he has no ways to practise. He ought to exchange Italian lessons for English."

Olivuzzi stole a look at Euphrosyne. She was staring out of the window with studied indifference. But Aurelius, straightway falling into that trap, suggested cordially:

"Lieutenant, you ought to get my daughters to help you. I've thought myself how fine it would be to learn Italian while walking round town."

"But, my dear sir," protested Mme. von Schwandorf,

"in Italy young ladies and gentlemen must n't do that!"

"What, then, ma'am?"

"One calls, perhaps, if the chaperon is at home."

"Indeed," Mr. Goodchild exclaimed, "what more charming school-room could there be than the garden!"

And his long-pent hospitality gushing forth, he called for tea beneath the palmetto palm.

Mme. von Schwandorf dexterously withdrew. Euphrosyne, after casting about for some decent excuse, surrendered, her head in a whirl. Federico, the piratical-looking waiter, brought the tray with profound respect. From a window overhead, Giannina, the maid, stared down. The gray mohair frock-coat of Domenico, the little door-porter, kept flitting through the glass corridor. To the servants this ceremony conveyed but one thought: the lieutenant had come to ask for the hand of the Signorina Frossie in marriage!

Olivuzzi sat straight in his chair, his knees and feet together, carefully poising the tea-cup under his chin. Not a hair on his head was out of place; not a wrinkle marred the fit of his uniform; not a speck dimmed the luster of his long, narrow boots. On his collar of stiff magenta cloth were fastened two silver stars. His gray trousers, strapped under his insteps, had double magenta stripes down the outside hems. In his sword-guard was stuffed a pair of white wash-leather gloves. Could it be, Aurelius wondered, that this immaculate youth had gone to a war, been mixed up with smoke and blood, and maybe taken a life?

"So you helped to carry the eagles back to the ancient battle-fields! Old Scipio Africanus, at Zama, must have occurred to your mind. No doubt it seemed to you that the ghosts of Roman legionaries rose on their elbows to cheer you forward. Marvelous! Really romantic! And yet, as our General Sherman said —"

While Aurelius rattled on, the lieutenant, who caught perhaps one word in a dozen, kept uttering respectful sounds of assent. Frossie imagined that if her father should say, in the same tone of voice, "The Italian army gives me a pain," the young man would go on eagerly nodding, as though to reply, "Me, too!" This thought — one of those bizarre ideas that flash through an overwrought mind — nearly cost her an hysterical snort. She felt her lips twitching; she knew the panic of those who are tempted to laugh in a church; for an instant she feared that the only alternative was to flee from the garden.

But she saw Aglaia and Thallie approaching through the glass corridor.

Aurelius presented the stranger. Jumping up, clapping his spurred heels together, Lieutenant Olivuzzi made two bows, uttered twice a phrase in Italian. Alas! why did Aglaia have on that new gown of yellow French print, with panniers of golden brown, and the silken slippers to match! And why did Thallie, in apple-green and white, look so much like a rosebud all dewy above its leaves! He was more acutely aware than ever was Frossie, now, of her awkward crash-outing-dress, her dust-powdered shoes, her perspiring forehead, her tumbling curls. But even if he had found her dressed for the evening, she wouldn't have looked like them.

At last the tea-cups stood empty, and he was taking his leave.

"You must come again," said Aglaia. With a wistful look she put out her hand in a movement arranged for the better the pose of her willowy form. Her smile expressed an unconscious, yet even sweeter, sentiment. He turned to Euphrosyne. She decided bit by bit that her sisters had been seductive enough for all.

And so it was that the afternoon passed.

A painful modesty kept her from extending her hand. Indeed, throughout his call those words of farewell were the only ones she had uttered.

He walked to the gate, turned round, bowed again, departed. Aglaia remarked:

"I must say, Frossie, you might have been more polite!"

"If I did n't simper enough, you surely made up for it."

"Children!"

"One moment, Dad. Let me tell you something, Frossie. Because you imagine he tried to flirt with you once in the street, you need n't have given him a frost when he was our guest. Be as prim as you want by yourself, but don't interfere again with our social chances. I understand these cavalry officers know the best people in town. Who is he, anyhow?"

"His mother," said Frossie, "is a marchioness. You might even yet call him back and give him a flower for his buttonhole!"

"Soldiers don't have buttonholes, my dear," drawled Aglaia, calmly.

"Too bad! Sticking flowers in buttonholes is one of the best things you do."

Leaving the rest aghast, she took herself off to her room.

She went straight to the looking-glass. Her hair had never seemed so flagrantly red. The strong sunshine of Florence had brought back all her freckles. The pince-nez clips had cut deep marks on each side of her nose, and she believed that the constant use of glasses had made her eyes smaller. If only she were better-looking,—not beautiful,—just comely enough to be sure! If only she knew how to smile on young men like Aglaia, or else, at least, escape her unfortunate awkwardness! Her sister was right: she

had given him an impression of disapproval. And now he would never come back, never know her as she had meant to be.

That night more than once Thalia heard Frossie rise from her bed to sit by the window. Was this restlessness due only to the throes of literary production? Or could it be that steady, sensible Frossie was falling in love? Thallie knew that a sign of love was to lose one's sleep: of late she had lost so much herself.

In fact, Thallie had also lost weight. Her coloring was less brilliant, and under her sky-blue eyes were drawn two tiny violet streaks. Nowadays she was listless, too, and often fretful. Her appetite had failed. When Federico brought round the *risotto*, the *spaghetti*, the *zuppa inglese*, she made an involuntary gesture of disgust.

Mr. Goodchild believed it was the heat. He awaited anxiously the thunder-storms, already overdue, on which the Florentines depended for relief in August. Meanwhile it might be well for Thallie to interrupt her painting till the autumn? He knew from experience how high a toll was demanded of vitality by "creative effort"! But Thallie cried:

"If I did n't have something to occupy my mind, I should go crazy in this place!"

She found a bitter satisfaction in suggesting that the others were to blame for her distress, that life in Florence was a martyrdom for her. Yet when Aurelius, in desperation, asked her where she would rather be, Thalia could not say. To her eyes all prospects appeared desolate, without the promise of one thrill of joy. Even Paris had ceased to be desirable; for of course the young man of the boat-deck was no longer there.

Or else, tossing on her hot bed, she would mutter: "No more nonsense! I have my work to do, my name to make.

Is n't it enough that I'm going to be another Rosa Bonheur?"

If that hope should crumble, too!

At such apprehensions, so plausible in the deep silence of the night, her brow became cold and moist. All at once she saw her canvases with a stranger's eye: their errors expanded to efface their merits; in mocking contrast there closed round them the masterpieces of the Uffizi and the Pitti Palaces, noble falls of drapery, gestures of an inspired grace, torsos that swelled with life, heads that mirrored living souls. Contemplating in memory the flesh of Titian's "Flora," the eyes of Rubens's wife, the hands of the clavichord-player attributed to Giorgione, she moaned, "I still know nothing, nothing, nothing!" And time was fleeting, and already she was nearly twenty-one!

Still, at nine o'clock every morning, she entered the studio of Alphonse Zolande, which had taken on the melancholy of a place where one has known only disappointment.

The painting-master had got his varnished boots resoled. He wore a new coat of purple velveteen already highly scented with Virginia cigarettes and chypre. His gray mustaches somehow looked less elderly these days. One morning, after staring for a moment, Thallie realized that he had shaved off his imperial.

For the summer months, no doubt?

She had learned enough French to understand most of what he said, and even to reply. He, praising her accent, made her repeat a sentence. His eyes, small and sharp, surrounded by yellowish sclerotics, were focused on her young lips, ripe, vivid, moving with exquisite self-consciousness as she pronounced those unaccustomed sounds. "Brava!" he cried, and sprang up with a strained, gay look. But while he paced the floor, with neck bent, wriggling his fingers, his leathery, jaundiced visage was gradu-

ally distorted by a supreme dejection. When at last he returned to her easel, M. Zolande declared in tones unnaturally harsh:

"Mademoiselle, how many times must I tell you that the supreme test of paint is a luminousness extending even to the shadows! Regard Bronzino! His flesh-tones are so because he made first a clean white under-painting, with very little oil. In Andrea del Sarto's portraits the shadows are painted light, on cool grisaille; the successive glazes give them depth, together with transparency. But when I say luminousness I do not mean these shiny whites, so easy to slop on, which remind me of that animal of a Bouguereau. Did the golden age of Titian stoop to them? No, Mademoiselle! Only moderns — these lazy, ignorant confectioners! True art has no subterfuges, no evasions, no labor-saving tricks. True art does always the large thing, the thing vastly difficult, that appears to those who do not know so simple!"

He brandished his fist; his wiry figure became tense and vibrant; he looked upward, as if glimpsing for an instant a fair mirage not seen since youth; his crackling voice resounded through the bare studio like a conjuration. The model followed his gesture with the dull gaze of a hypnotist's subject. But Thallie could not respond to-day even to that cry. She began to have a sense of unreality, as if all this were extraordinary, mad, and futile, like a dream. Bronzino, Andrea del Sarto, Titian! Why did people work so hard to imitate them? Why was she here, taking lessons from an eccentric "old man of fifty," to whom no other pupils ever came? Why did she want to learn painting, anyway — to spend her life daubing colors on a piece of cloth for folks to stare at?

A knock rattled the door. M. Zolande was called into the corridor.

The visitor, a man whose face Thallie never saw, came often, like that, for a moment's conversation. On the landing he and the painting-teacher wrangled in French and in Italian. At times the latter's voice rose indignantly. One heard, "What, the same for a Correggio? But the panel alone costs fifty francs!" Or: "Six weeks for everything! Are you asking me to ruin my reputation?" And from the unknown, suavely, but with a quiver of spite, "In Florence, you know, I might even find some one else!" Thallie wondered where she had heard a voice like that one.

At noon, bidding the master and the model good-day, she went slowly down the four flights into Via de' Bardi. Sometimes she was halfway across the Ponte Vecchio before she met her father, hurrying to escort her home. He apologized for being late: he had stopped to watch the pigeons in the colonnades. His glance ran lovingly over Thallie's face. Discovering on her ear a smear of paint, he made her step into a doorway, moistened with his tongue a corner of his handkerchief as big as a dinner-napkin, and held her chin steady, while he made the matter worse.

In the afternoon, since the chatter of the others now increased her irritation, Thallie went out alone. Many beautiful objects and perspectives she passed without a glance while on those solitary walks; she was filled with an emotion deeper than any satisfaction from esthetic things—the ecstasy of sentimental misery. "Why can I not forget him?" she asked herself, while knowing in her soul that forgetfulness could not repay her for the pleasure of these pangs. Indeed, she nursed his memory in her heart as a priestess might nurse the fire in a sanctuary, because, at each recollection that she was in love, there returned to her a sensation wonderfully sweet, for all its bitterness, a feeling of melancholy pride. "I shall never again be the little girl I was!" And something of the majesty of great his-

toric passions, of famous amorous heroines, raised her above the passers-by.

In Via Tornabuoni, toward five o'clock, the sidewalks filled, the tea-rooms began to buzz, the fashionable hour struck. One day as Thallie was passing through this crowd, a figure appeared on the step of a tobacconist's shop. Her heart gave a dreadful leap.

He — the young man of the boat-deck!

There he stood, in light flannels, smart, debonair, superior, watching the Florentines as who should say: "They amuse me, these people. Everything amuses me. The world was made expressly for my amusement." He was happy. He had not suffered. He had even forgotten her existence; for when he caught sight of her, his was the stare of a stranger.

But his brows contracted. And now, without evincing half enough surprise, he was approaching, hat in hand, his blond hair glinting in the sunlight. Once more, at last, she saw that smile of his, half mocking and half tender; once more she heard the pleasant, clipping speech that had sounded through so many dreams:

"Fancy meeting you down here in all this heat!"

She echoed mechanically:

"Fancy meeting you down here!"

She had a touch of vertigo.

"I say, how pale you are!"

"The sun," she uttered.

"You don't feel like fainting?"

"I don't know."

She thought, "Is that what's happening to me?" and immediately everything whirled round. Then she found that she was walking quickly, that his hand clasped her arm, that he was saying: "Buck up! Get hold of yourself! Here we are!" Gloom surrounded her. She sank into a

were parted in a ravishing curve; her lace collar, falling open at the neck, revealed the milk-white throat, so smooth, so fragrant of her youth, its tissues pulsating from the beating of her heart. He gazed at her with the attention of a precocious connoisseur of beauty. He displayed the look that he had shown for a moment on the boat-deck. Leaning his elbows on the table, he inquired:

"How long are you staying in Florence?"

"We're living here. I'm studying my painting."

"That's so. You were going to be an artist, and paint my portrait."

"You remembered that!"

"But I remember everything," he responded warmly, leaning nearer. She stirred as a rose stirs in all its petals at the voice of the south wind.

Then, looking up quickly, at a subconscious twinge of guilt, she saw Lieutenant Olivuzzi, strolling with two brother-officers past the table. The Italian bowed deeply, gravely, as it were reprovingly. Drawing back, she caught up her gloves.

"I ought to go!"

On the sidewalk Reginald Dux demanded:

"A friend of yours?"

"A friend of my sisters. These Italians," she stammered, "don't understand American ideas. Now he'll think I'm very queer."

His face cleared.

"Silly asses!"

"Are n't they? As if —"

All too conveniently an empty cab drove up beside her; and just because it was there, she blundered into it. She was shocked when he took off his hat to say good-by. But he was drinking in her pure young loveliness, in the sunshine more wonderful than in the shadowy tea-room or on

the starlit boat-deck. He came closer. He rested his hand on the cushions beside her arm.

"Will you be here when I come back this way from Rome? It's *au revoir*, then?"

"Au revoir."

Her voice was of a bird-like liquidity, ready to break.

As she was borne swiftly homeward, she saw at last how beautiful, how dear a place this Florence was.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE LAST CHAIR IS FILLED: THE CIRCLE IS COMPLETED

EVERY morning when Thallie opened her eyes her first thought was, "Perhaps it will be to-day!" With one bound she was out of bed. Disdaining slippers, she pattered across the floor of cool, red tiles to throw back the shutters with a bang. The sunshine streamed over her as she leaned on the window-sill to gaze down at the garden.

The pink and yellow roses now hid the iron fence. On the gate-posts the two crumbling urns were veiled with full-blown petals, all their scars invisible beneath that gorgeous flowering. The peonies, round the arbor, had also reached the height of their exuberance, while the vines on the house-wall, at last attaining Thallie's window, had laid across the sill three glowing blossoms, had brought to her, finally, their hues and fragrance like an augury.

She looked forth with a sort of awe upon this prospect, the charms of which she had never really seen before. Her joy was mingled with remorse, because not till now had she appreciated her surroundings. She wanted to make some sacrifice in return for this exquisite environment, for this rich sunlight and aromatic warmth, for the sensation that came to her, on drinking in this air, of youth inexpressibly buoyant, delicate, and thrilling. Solemnly her eyes turned toward the bright blue of the Italian sky. But her lips, instead of uttering her thanksgiving, voiced his name; and

for some reason a shivery faintness ran through her body to her fingertips as there rose from the depths of the orange-tree the limpid twittering of sparrows. But, then, every sight, every sound, had taken on an unprecedented poignancy and sweetness. Even when she heard across the garden the rattle of dishes in the kitchen, she reflected ecstatically, "Every day for a long, long time I shall hear that in this peaceful, cozy, dear old pension!"

When she approached her mirror she met the stare of two eyes dilated by an avid curiosity; she watched a face flushing at the full revelation of its secret. She felt her heart beating faster as she said, "Yes, some day I shall show him this look, too!" When? Her imagination seethed. She discerned a church-nave — brown gloom shot with long, diagonal shafts of gold and purple — an aisle festooned with white ribbons, a congregation rising, turning, scrutinizing her blushes and virginal apparel. She heard the roll of wheels, the crack of old slippers against varnished panels, a whisper against her cheek in the shadows of the speeding carriage. A low cry escaped her, and, panting as if she had just run all the way upstairs, she turned from the mirror, in which she had seen for an instant the visage of a lovely stranger.

While dressing, Thallie could not forbear to sing. Down in the glass corridor Federico, the waiter, stopped short, cocked his bullet-head, showed on his gaunt, gloomy face a smile as startling as if one should descry a baby's crib on the quarter-deck of a corsair. Aglaia and Frossie exchanged through their connecting doorway a puzzled look; but Mr. Goodchild was delighted. At last his little Thallie was herself again.

When he and she set out for the studio of M. Zolande, once more, as in the days of Zenasville, she chose a rose-bud for his coat-lapel — then, standing amid the flowers that her

face resembled, enhanced that favor with a kiss. Gaily they marched beside the Arno. The father, radiant, squared his stooping shoulders, stepped briskly, flourished his ancient cane of ebony, to which at last a ferrule had been affixed. The daughter, leaning lightly on his arm, nudged him to call attention to a distant hill, crowned with a ruined tower and umbrella pines.

"Yes, I must really go and sketch it," Aurelius exclaimed. "We'll sketch it together, you and I, by a new process of mine that dispenses with the science of perspective!" And he told her that he had made another great discovery, bound to be of inestimable value in the world of art. By coating a sheet of glass with Naples yellow,—which did not become opaque for fifteen minutes,—one could trace the outline of any object through the paint. "No more measurements! No perplexities! Good for figures as well as landscapes. Every proportion placed exactly, in a jiffy! And so much simpler than a *chambre-claire*!"

"But a painting on glass," protested Thallie, with the judicial accent of an expert.

"Why not? The Medievals laid their color on wood, the Romans on fresco, the Greeks on clay, the Egyptians on stone. Or else, afterward one could treat a canvas with silver and make a photographic print, using the glass as a negative. Or, for a picture of heroic size, a bromid enlargement. I shall patent the process, and sell it to some big concern for a quarter — no, a half-interest!"

In his elation he increased his pace. Then, halting, mopping his forehead, pointing across the river, in a different tone he said:

"There's the window from which *Rodolfo* is thrown into the Arno, unconscious, sewn up in a sack. But a good-hearted fisherman —"

He turned his pockets inside out, produced a mass of

papers, and, walking slowly, read out his latest ideas for the tragic poem:

"Night! N. B., come out some evening and observe aspect of river by moonlight. Clock strikes twelve! N. B., look up, in National Library archives, what clock-towers then existed in vicinity: better take along an interpreter. A splash! Fisherman starts from doze! Query: what costume was worn by fishermen in those days, and what fish are caught in the Arno? You see, Thallie, in literature as in everything else genius is still in part the infinite capacity for taking pains. I say in part, because, after all, the most painstaking man with no other appropriate qualities could hardly become a Flaubert, a Phidias, or a Palestrina. It stands to reason!"

"But when one has the other qualities also," murmured Thallie, squeezing his hand.

"And the ripeness of age! Yes, I've a feeling that none of us was brought to Florence for nothing."

"I, too," she whispered.

And at the door in Via de' Bardi she threw her arms round his neck. "Dear old Daddy! Forgive me for being so cranky all those days." With a hug and a sob, she ran upstairs and entered the studio, breathless, moist-eyed, smiling mistily, like Spring suddenly appearing in the lair of Winter.

How fast her work went now! How much easier it was to understand and to apply M. Zolande's advice! Besides, her sharpened artistic intuition solved difficulties of itself; each brush-stroke showed a reckless vigor; her last canvas, placed beside the old ones, looked to her like the product of another hand.

Out there in the sunshine, above the bright domes and the campanile, against the hazy hills of mauve and gold, her mirage of glory again became distinct.

While the model rested, the master informed Thallie that now his winter pupils would soon be coming in. This place would presently be crowded, and rivalry would add another impetus to labor. Also, there would be some exhibitions of his pupils' work, informal studio teas, at which one might meet the aristocracy that had been away all summer. Even in September many notables returned from the seaside resorts; the first one of them expected was a patroness of his, Princess Tchernitza, a Bulgarian, whom Thallie might find interesting.

Or else, plotting to add a gleam of admiration to those bright young eyes, he told of great artists who had been his school-time friends, revealed their eccentricities, their weaknesses, the most presentable of their love-affairs. His stories, since he seemed very old to her, evoked for Thallie scenes that Garvani or Daumier might have sketched — of young geniuses grotesquely handsome in side-whiskers, chimney-pot hats, and haircloth stocks; of rooms decorated with yataghans and death-masks; of gazelle-eyed women in crinoline and India shawls, showing a bit of white stocking on the staircase of the Café Anglais, while surrounded by wasp-waisted dandies with the profiles of hungry rats. In a haze such as casts round past epochs an ambiguous attractiveness, one saw details as vague and jumbled as the elements in a Futurist painting — long, slender champagne-glasses rising in riotous salute; a supper-table with guttering candles and an over-turned epergne; the rout of vivandières and harlequins through Paris streets at dawn; a long kiss — art drawing power from love, and love enriched by art — in the twilight of a mansard window high above a weeping-willow-tree.

Alphonse Zolande, too, must have drunk his fill of that frenetic life? She tried to imagine him as he had been in youth, slender, melancholy, nervous, and dreamy, like that

hero of Balzac so eager for renown and love. Had he missed the second with the first?

While putting on her hat, she noticed a spray of fresh flowers by the looking-glass. Did some woman even now come, when the studio was silent, to evoke the phantom of an old romance, like Mme. Arnoux in "The Sentimental Education"? Thallie looked at him attentively, saw again his wrinkles and his gray mustaches, and found that thought ridiculous. Even the omniscience of twenty years ignores the fact that one at fifty may still dream of kisses.

With a cheery glance,—the candid glance that twenty keeps for old gray heads,—with a clear adieu, and a last scattering of indefinable fragrance, Spring vanished from the abode of Winter. Alphonse Zolande stood pensive, his face at the same time saddened and rejuvenated by his thoughts. His model, smiling to herself while buttoning her shoes, did not exist for him. His eyes were attracted by Thalia's canvas; he squinted at the fresh paint absent-mindedly; a look of shame, of self-contempt, banished the cynical lines from around his mouth. "Poor child! 'T is true; all this business is hardest when one is met by trust." But abruptly he raised his head with a savage grin, and the man he had been once on a time was masked by the man he had become. "What the devil! One must live, or, at least, that is the delusion." And bitterly, like a slave who prepares for a repellent task while dreaming of some far-off land, he brought out from the adjoining room a wooden panel on which appeared the outline of a sixteenth-century Madonna. His own day's work was beginning. M. Zolande, when not teaching, was a counterfeiter of old masters.

Thallie, meanwhile, had set out briskly for the pension. Mr. Goodchild, late as usual, met her midway of the Ponte Vecchio. Across the heads of wondering pedestrians he

made extraordinary gestures of delight. He had letters from Zenasville.

They read them all the way home.

Dr. Numble had finished another chapter of the *magnum opus*. He was now St. Louis of France, and his letter, in parts, relapsed unconsciously into the stilted phraseology of the crusader-historian de Joinville.

Selina Inchkin had resigned the rôle of *Juliet* for *Hedda Gabler*. She believed her future lay in portraying "women who had lived, tasted the bitterness of life, learned all the lessons of a tortured temperament." She asked Aurelius to send her translations of such foreign plays as developed "strong, sad characters, souls struggling against conventions." The fact was, an Ibsen Club had been formed in Zenasville. Selina hoped to revive her fading laurels, at town-hall theatricals, by keeping pace with this new enthusiasm for despair.

Ira Inchkin had written a postscript. It began, "I take it you have n't met any impresarium as yet?" It ended, "Your house is still standing hitched, waiting for you to play out those foreign parts."

A wave of longing swept over Mr. Goodchild. At this very hour Maple Lane was roofed with green, redolent of many gardens, and, best of all, permeated with the sweet essence of old haunts. Ah, the broken picket-fence, the gorgeous, though disheveled, flower-beds, the little battered door, flanked by its sign, askew, dilapidated, inscribed,

Aurelius Goodchild, Esquire,
Interviews by Appointment!

Ah, the odors of the antiquated sofas, carpets, lambrequins; the savor of the dark-room; the familiar silences; the memories of exultations and discouragements, of griefs and joys — all equally precious! He ventured:

"Thallie, you're never homesick just a teeny-weeny bit, just a moment?"

"For Zenasville?"

The tone of her inquiry was sufficient answer.

Every day she searched the "Paris Herald" for news of the aviation meet at Rome. How long would it last? Was he, too, going up in those monoplanes and biplanes? He might be maimed for life or killed. Suddenly weak, she saw him prostrate in a field, pinned under the wreckage of an aeroplane that gave forth sheets of flame.

But that afternoon Domenico, the door-porter, handed her a post-card. Across a photograph of Bernini's "Daphne and Apollo" these words were scrawled:

Entirely ruined by so-called semi-tropical sun and reputed cooling drinks. Nothing left but bumps of memory and location. Beginning to prepare to get ready to struggle back to Florence.

The fact that there was no signature seemed to add a delightful intimacy to this message.

How many times did she not press the post-card to her lips, pore over those few words for other meanings, ask herself why he had chosen "Daphne and Apollo," then once more thrust her treasure into the bosom of her dress! In that warm confinement, the ink was soon smudged, the moist pasteboard took the contour of her bosom.

She ran into Frossie's room, strewed a handful of Florence roses on the writing-table, interrupted the first chapter of the new novel, at the point where,

For five minutes a stranger had been following Angelica through the alleyways, a young knight, with a creamy pallor and crisp locks of raven black.

Frossie had decided to make the goldsmith the villain, the Ghibelline knight the hero, after all.

"Now, then, Thallie, just because your day's work happens to be done!"

"But look at the clock, old Lovins! It's nearly tea-time! Nose-powdering time! Calling time! The historic twentieth of September! Alarums and incursions! The Italian army at the gates!"

Euphrosyne started, sent a swift glance at Thallie, and answered, with a half-vexed, nervous laugh:

"In that case, you and Aggie can receive them with full honors."

"Fat chance! The Italian army showed plainly enough on its first reconnaissance that Aggie and I were n't worth its powder. I'm resigned, understand, in spite of all those magenta fixings. But maybe Aggie does n't like her best tricks to go to waste?"

"She'll hear you!"

"Her door's closed. But what right has she to shut off the family draft like this?"

"She's lying down with a headache. You know this worry about her voice is telling on her."

"There's always Sir Cyril the Jack-knife to console her under the palm tree. Green calcium! A few bars of 'Hearts and Flowers,' please, Professor —"

"O Thallie, how can you say such things!"

"I don't know," said Thallie, sobered, remorseful. "Because I'm happy, I guess." She tip-toed to the door, peeped into Aglaia's room, saw her sister stretched on the bed with closed eyes and features apparently composed in sleep.

But Aglaia, wide awake, was rallying all her courage against an unknown fate. Since Mughetto's verdict, she had quite forgotten the ambassadorial coach; the only life that now seemed worth living was a prima donna's. But a contralto! Perhaps not even that. "Never! Never! I

will be a soprano! If I fix my whole mind on it, nothing can keep it from coming to pass!" Then she remembered that pear-shaped face, ruddy, black-bearded, remorseless, and the words, "A contralto, badly damaged." And for the hundredth time she groaned, "If only Madame Linkow were here!"

One afternoon, as it were straight out of a blue sky, Mme. Bertha Linkow appeared before the Pension Schwandorf.

A motor-engine racketed, a siren hooted, laughter resounded through the quiet street. The sisters, just dressed for tea, crowded the balcony of the front bedroom. At the curb a big touring-car held three women and three men. Mme. Linkow waved a green veil. A fat fellow with a large, good-natured face removed his hat. Domenico came skipping, ushered them into the garden, turned pale with awe. The fat man with the large face was the greatest living tenor!

The girls flew down-stairs. Between the peonies and the lily-beds Mme. Linkow embraced each of them with a cracking hug.

She had not changed, unless she was a trifle stouter. A collapsible hood of tan linen covered her golden hair like the casque of an Amazon; the warmth of Italy had given her Teutonic fairness the transparency of a pink poppy; her inexhaustible vitality enveloped the three Graces as she cried:

"*Ach*, how fine you look! What cheeks, what eyes, after this frightful summer! Now, then, all you motor-bandits, was I right when I said I would show you something nice? Wait! Introductions! Children, this is *Giulietta*, out of the 'Tales of Hoffmann.' *Scarpia*, forward! Off with your goggles; make a pretty bow! The barrel in spats is naughty *Gennaro*, who steals the jewels of the Madonna. *Carmen*, if you rubbed off your lip-paint you

might offer each a kiss. Not you, big booby!" She gave the greatest tenor a push in the chest, then, leading him forward by the ear, "*Il Pagliaccio!* Though he left his clown's suit at home, who would know the difference? But hark to my voice! All that dust! My throat is ruined! Did you give back my pastils, Luisa? Then where are they? At any rate, some tea, for the love of Heaven!"

Domenico, who had been hovering near by with fallen jaw, started off toward the kitchen at a run. All sank into chairs as Mme. Linkow called after the door-porter:

"And lots of bread and butter!"

The sisters stared at their visitors almost in disbelief.

They were all foreigners, the men robust-looking despite the deep marks that many various emotions had imprinted on their faces; the women, whom Mme. Linkow had nicknamed *Carmen* and *Giulietta*, handsome in an extravagant, exotic way. They were dressed with conventional smartness, their manners faithfully imitated custom, yet one suspected, beneath their modishness, a subtle abnormality.

But it was impossible to see them in their true complexions, for each was surrounded by the aura of celebrity. Their faces, though made familiar by countless reproductions in the public prints, did not seem like the visages of ordinary mortals. The three Graces instinctively attributed to them as many complex qualities as a German professor would weave into the character of *Hamlet*. All their adventures in the fields of esthetic exaltation and of fame seemed to imbue their eyes with an unbearable keenness, similar to the glances of demi-gods that used to turn primeval shepherds dizzy. Besides, this unexpected contact with great artists, whom the barrier of the footlights kept, for most people, in a sort of mythical atmosphere, was like a dream, during which the impossible is realized amid bizarre circumstances.



"Though he left his clown's suit at home, who would know the difference?"



Aglaia was the first to recover from these feelings. In a tone of careless pleasure, of easy intimacy, she asked Mme. Linkow :

"How in the world did you find out where we were?"

"Why, from your friend John Holland. He is at Montecatini, too."

She thought: "How did he learn our name? He must have inquired at the Geneva pension after we were gone." Her emerald eyes turned speculative, then inscrutable.

Domenico and Federico reverently served the tea.

"But your papa!"

Mr. Goodchild was still down-town, pursuing inspiration through the fancied haunts of *Fiammetta* and *Rodolfo*.

"And I am to miss that dear man?"

"No; stay to dinner," Thallie blurted out, then turned red at her effrontery.

"Blessèd child! That will be easier another day."

Cyril Bellegram passed through the glass corridor without looking round. Bristles, however, ran into the garden, fawned at Aglaia's feet, and eyed the muffin-plate. The greatest tenor growled ferociously: the Irish terrier, barking a wild defiance, retreated into a thicket — then, with a grin that raised his tow-like whiskers, made friends. He had crunched his second lump of sugar when a whistle sounded. He raced away.

"So goes the world," remarked the greatest tenor in Italian, with a shrug. The sisters felt as if they had heard Solomon himself pronounce a proverb.

"And your work, Thallie? This little one, you should know, is going to be an artist."

"A soprano?"

"Bah! Are there no other kinds of artists besides singers? Aglaia, there, is the prima donna of the family."

The song-birds smiled politely at Aglaia; but when she

mentioned Valentino Mughetto, an argument broke forth in Italian. Some, maintaining that Mughetto was an excellent teacher, cited singers who "owed him everything." Others offered examples of his pupils' errors. Above the clatter of talk rose fragments of operatic airs, delivered in an affected way, to illustrate by parody the maestro's faults. As the noise increased, the demigods' self-repression ended in a flurry of gestures. Only the greatest tenor maintained composure. With a sleepy grin, he began to stuff bread-crumbs into the fingers of Mme. Linkow's gloves.

The maternal German was whispering to Aglaia:

"Pay no attention to these magpies! Mughetto is all right. Whatever he tells you —"

"But if he tells me that I've ruined my voice?"

The smile faded from Mme. Linkow's wholesome face. She responded gently:

"Then you, at least, would find courage to resign yourself that day, not in after-years, when you had spent much time and money all in vain."

A steely flash was quickly hidden by Aglaia's lashes.

"And your limb," queried Frossie, timidly. "It's all right now?"

"*Himmel*, that leg of mine is now the best barometer in Europe! But what of your book? And Thallie has not yet told me how she progresses. All day on a high stool in the Uffizi, painting the saints, and shedding the ogles of these young devils of Florentine artists ever copying the Venuses?"

"No, indeed! Still studio-work for me."

"With whom?"

"Monsieur Alphonse Zolande."

"I don't know him. He has many pupils?"

"No others yet."

"And how old is he?"

"Oh, ages!"

Mme. Linkow compressed her lips.

"Maybe some day I would drop in on you and your Monsieur Zolande, old as the hills, in his so-roomy studio."

"Then you'll really come back?"

"Will I really — look at her, Luisa! Is n't she a picture? But now at least we must run and do our shopping. Where are my gloves? Oh, the wretch! Only let me get hold of you!"

The demigods paid their respects to the young hostesses. They surrounded the three Graces with a sudden urbanity, with the cordiality of persons on the point of fleeing boredom. Their valuable voices assumed a dulcet tone:

"To see you again, Signorina. A thousand thanks, Signorina." And in English: "Good-a-by, Signorina. Good-a-by."

"*Auf wiedersehen*, Aglaia; we must soon talk of this again. *Auf wiedersehen*, my Frossie! *Auf wiedersehen*, Little Beautiful! My love to your good papa!"

The touring-car started with a roar. As it turned the corner, the greatest tenor was striving to tie Mme. Linkow's green veil around *Gennaro's* head.

"Was n't it wonderful!" sighed Thallie.

Aglaia, departing for her bedroom, offered no response.

That visit had excited her tremendously. That technical chatter had resounded deep in her being like a clarion-call. The erratic charm of those singers had struck from her heart-strings a chord of perfect harmony. Now she felt more intensely than ever that only amid such surroundings, and while following such fortunes, could she realize her most profound desires.

She believed in the dynamic force of an unfaltering ambition, in the power of the mind to alter physical states, attract prosperity, enrich the future. It was only necessary

that one should expect success with perfect confidence. She recalled the career of Mary Garden, whose voice was said to be inferior to her determination. A long shudder ran through her body, as if freeing her person once for all from every indecision and foreboding. She was pervaded with an almost supernatural assurance, while the image of Mughetto, who had presumed to set a limit to her possibilities, dwindled and disappeared.

It would be necessary to find another teacher, able to perceive that sheer will power was going to efface her disabilities, as if she stood, believing, in the Grotto of Lourdes. Yet such a man was not discovered in a day, at least in Florence. Soon she might have to lead the Goodchild family to Milan, Paris, or Berlin?

Meanwhile, she could no longer bear inaction. She bought fresh text-books, opened the new piano, plunged into work again. When her sisters, running in at her first notes, recalled to her Mughetto's warning, Aglaia's nerves contracted; she retorted, "Let me be the judge of my own business," and slammed her bedroom door. She began to find the others and their apprehensions insufferable. Suppose the influence of those doubting minds should secretly undermine her will? After all, true art was only free to flourish in solitude!

On the other hand, if the famous Tosi was right,—if a student gained more from imitation than from the usual instruction,—Florence itself, so poor in opera, was not the place for her. As a matter of fact, for some time she had resented the local lack of an artistic atmosphere, for which she had come abroad, from which she had expected to derive great stimulation. Why, she should have done better in New York, where one could hear more good music in a week than Italy furnished in a year! Also, she had lately learned that one did not have to triumph first in

Europe. Lilli Lehmann, for instance, had been unknown before her début at the Metropolitan.

"Never mind; from this time on I'll make no more false steps!"

And she resumed her practice.

According to Henderson, the first thing was to master breath-control. Aglaia gathered that one should not begin by planning how to use the lungs, but merely make the best sounds possible, noting at the same time the play of chest and diaphragm. Slipping out of her clothes, standing before the mirror like a slim, pale statue, slowly she sang the scale. Contrary to Lamperti, the abdomen did not expand!

Well, since the body could be trusted to breathe effectively without instruction, what was the use of this performance? Aglaia donned her clothes, unlocked the door, read farther in Henderson:

The great point is not the direction of the muscles in breathing, but the acquisition of a deep, steady respiration —

"Why the dickens did n't I read that before I got all undressed!"

In Mme. Sembrich's judgment, the lungs should be stored with air at intervals in half-breaths previous to a long flow of tone. Aglaia squinted at Gounod's "*Roi de Thulé*," seized a pencil, set to marking the score with such breathing-points as paved the way, in her opinion, for an excellent cantilena. But when she began to sing, she was conscious of an effort in her throat, though she should have felt it only in her body.

"My attack is at fault?"

She returned to the text-books. Presently, striking a note on the piano, she uttered loudly:

"Ah-h-h!"

But that sound, beginning with a cluck, swelled to a

strangled bleat. Again, without paying so much attention to the tongue!

"Ah-h-h-h!"

Again!

In the next room, Euphrosyne, bending closer to the writing-table, tried to concentrate her mind on Chapter Two, entitled, "A Quiet Home in Medieval Florence."

Frossie's writing, in spite of distractions, was every day more gratifying. She had now for heroine a young girl in humble circumstances, on the threshold of her first genuine infatuation. The consequent feelings of *Angelica* were much easier to describe than Frossie had expected. The fair Florentine's thoughts, reduced to black and white, brought to the writer that glow only possible when truth has been translated into words. Frossie, unaware that in *Angelica* she was picturing herself, believed that she had attained at last, by favor of a mysterious force called "the divine afflatus," the novelist's necessary insight into life. She was even awed by her success in the portrayal of a heart; she was tempted to attribute her new-found facility to uncanny powers; she wondered if some genius now dwelling in the world of spirits had not been moved to cast his mantle over her, to let her complete for mortals the work he had left unfinished. All the same, her *Angelica* did not progress beyond sensations that were the fruit of fleeting glances only: for Frossie had not refreshed her inspiration by another meeting with Lieutenant Olivuzzi.

It was her coldness on the occasion of his visit that had discouraged him? But, in that case, he had called on her account alone?

Giannina, the maid, did not try to dissemble her inquisitiveness. Almost resentfully, she demanded:

"And the Signor Tenente, Signorina? What did you do to him, that he has never come back?"

Mme. von Schwandorf seemed disgruntled, also.

One afternoon, while out walking with Thalia, Euphrosyne drew her sister past the Nobles' Club. There he stood in the doorway with three officers of his regiment. Solemnly he bowed, and would have let it go at that; but Frossie, summoning all her courage, hesitated and looked back. Lieutenant Olivuzzi was instantly beside them.

She got out the words:

"You're quite a stranger."

"Excoose, Signorina?"

"I say you're quite a stranger at our house."

She repeated the sentence in her best Italian; Thallie echoed her in French. His lustrous eyes sent out a flash, his clear pallor was dashed with crimson, beneath his fierce little black mustaches his fine teeth glistened in a breathless smile.

"You permit?"

"Why, of course. Very happy, I'm sure."

As he found nothing to say at once, and the silence was unbearable, she gave a meaningless, strained laugh.

"And now we must really be going," she stammered.

The absurdity of this remark was worst of all. But Lieutenant Olivuzzi did not seem to think so. He inclined his head, put into his farewell a wealth of admiration and respect, watched them till they turned into the Lungarno.

"Old Slyboots!" laughed Thallie, squeezing Euphrosyne's plump arm. When the other would have protested, she added, her voice suddenly all rich and warm, "But suppose I had a little boasting of my own to do?" And she poured out her story of the young man of the boat-deck.

"Thallie! All this time, and not a word!"

"But now I can hardly wait for you to see him," cried Thallie, meaning in her heart, "Now I can hardly wait for

you to see how much more wonderful he is than any lieutenant!"

Her impatience was soon gratified.

In the hall of the pension they found Cyril Bellegram huddled on a divan, sucking his empty pipe, staring before him resentfully. Some stranger, some mere caller, had pre-empted his bench beneath the palmetto palm! In fact, a young man was lounging out there now in an irritating state of nattiness and self-assurance, in cream-colored flannels and a wide-brimmed panama of the finest texture, his rose-hued stockings rivaling the garden-plats, the smoke of his cigarette contaminating the aroma of the blossoms. It was Reginald Dux.

He had arrived the night before from Rome with Hector Gillamoor. At this moment the latter was visiting an Italian friend near Quarto; but Reginald had been waiting in the garden for an hour. Now it was nearly dinner-time.

What prevented his dining at the pension?

"I was just waiting to be asked."

Aglaia appeared, and Mr. Goodchild.

"Mr. Dux — from the ship, you know," Thalia explained demurely. She nudged Frossie as a hint to back her up, then sent Aglaia a swift look which said, "It's he, the one I confessed about that night in Paris!"

"Welcome, young sir," cried Mr. Goodchild, taking the other's hand, and beaming. "The face is perfectly familiar. Wait a second! It was in the smoking-room on that memorable voyage!"

The pleasures and discomforts of that voyage, which they had shared, bound them together with the ties of strange adventure. Mr. Goodchild displayed such emotion as some old veteran of Jason's *Argo* might have shown on meeting, long afterward, one who had passed with him

through the perils of mysterious seas, questing the Golden Fleece. "Yes, that was a trip to remember," he affirmed, his eyes turning toward the pink sky at recollection. "And did you see the whale that day? And did you suffer from that storm when we first set out from New York?" While Thallie and Frossie were up-stairs changing into dinner-frocks, he described in detail an invention by which he intended to make sea-sickness obsolete—a bed balanced by hydraulics, guarantied to maintain an equilibrium no matter how the ship behaved.

"That's very interesting; but has n't it been tried?"

"Not properly."

They dined at eight. Cyril Bellegram was persuaded to join them. Mr. Goodchild ordered Chianti for his guests, and with the coffee, which was served beneath the palm-tree, a green cordial made in the monastery of Certosa. The girls sampled this liqueur and found it "rather like candy."

"You've been all this while in Florence and never tried it before?"

Mr. Goodchild explained that his family did not feel the need of stimulants. The foreign custom of taking alcohol with meals was doubtless reasonable, because of climatic peculiarities; at home, he felt sure, there was no such necessity. Indeed, American idealism had already perceived this fact. Mr. Bryan was virtually a Prohibitionist; the secretary of the navy had forbidden fermented beverages on the war-ships. Aurelius predicted that in fifty years the United States would be entirely dry.

"Oh, well," cried Reginald Dux, raising his second glass of chartreuse, "by that time I'll be too old to care."

The three Graces found something manly in his recklessness.

His well-shaped head, covered with blond hair closely

clipped, was held erect in the pose of one sure of his importance in whatever company. His slightly aquiline nose and drooping eyelids still suggested an aristocratic hauteur, but his sensitive mouth, always ready to curl upward at the corners, from time to time abated this effect. Nevertheless, one perceived that he was used to surroundings more luxurious than these. As the rattle of dishes was wafted from the kitchen, Thallie began to feel apologetic.

His rose-colored cravat was ornamented with a large pink pearl; his finger-ring was set with a cabochon ruby of unusual size; his shirt, of the finest silk, was woven with tiny, lustrous stripes of pink. Cyril Bellegram, even in his dinner-jacket, looked rusty in comparison. Aglaia, leaning forward, inquired:

"Do you expect to be in Florence long?"

At that moment Lieutenant Olivuzzi appeared. Stiff, grave, correct in every gesture, he ushered forward a young man in a uniform identical with his — a young man with rat-tail mustaches, swarthy, bony, of an extraordinary ugliness, yet distinguishable at first glance as a person of good breeding.

"Lieutenant Fava of the Magenta Cavalry!"

Lieutenant Fava sat down beside Thallie, and all discussed the weather.

So warm for the end of September! Olivuzzi managed to announce that for the last three nights all Florence had sat panting in the piazzas, listening to the bands. Aurelius acknowledged:

"That's something we've yet to do. I mean, take in the night life of the town."

"Is it possible! Why not this evening? We might go to the Café Marco."

Five minutes later they were on their way.

They walked down the Lungarno. Mr. Goodchild

tramped between Frossie and Thallie; Cyril Bellegram and Lieutenant Fava flanked that phalanx; the rear-guard — and how this had happened two of the three Graces did not know — was composed of Aglaia, Reginald, and Olivuzzi. Pedestrians took to the gutter amiably; eight pairs of feet struck the pavement in unison; some one began, in imitation of a bugle, the bersagliere marching-tune. But Thallie and Frossie strained their ears to catch Aglaia's words.

She was calling Reginald's attention to the moon.

Floating clear of the house tops, it filled the heavens with a radiance at the same time soft and dazzling. Beneath this sheen all objects while clear apparently were curiously ambiguous, drenched with the ether of illusion. The Arno, made narrow by the summer drought, stood forth between its sandbanks like a highway for immortal feet, shimmering as from the art of some celestial lapidary. The palaces, raising their worn façades along the quays, were transfigured like the dwellings of imagination. And the soul of Florence, evoked by the silence and this magic light, rose from the river and the city to pervade the air, while a veil which had composed the reality of every-day was drawn toward the zenith and absorbed into the moonbeams.

They skirted the colonnades of the Uffizi, where the shapes of famous Florentines stared down like brooding wraiths. They passed through alleyways where shadows effaced half a dozen centuries. They arrived before the bright café: a babble of voices and violins gushed forth to them. They entered a long room, crowded, smoky, a-glitter with reflected lights.

A table had just been vacated near the band-platform. Waiters came running with more chairs. Frossie and Thallie exchanged a resolute glance. When all were seated, one saw, beside the latter, Reginald, and by the

former, Olivuzzi. Aglaia, expressionless, sat between her father and Lieutenant Fava.

But there was one chair too many.

"Ask them to leave it," said Mr. Goodchild, gaily. "Who knows that another friend won't come along? Besides, according to the Hebrew cabala, the number nine would be more auspicious than the number eight."

"You're superstitious, sir?"

"At any rate, many famous men have been so, even Pythagoras."

They ordered ices, beer in steins, vermouth and seltzer, syrups diluted with cold water.

The waiters, their trays balanced high, moved through the smoke-clouds behind the close-packed heads. Everywhere appeared grotesque and classic profiles — cheeks distended with food, mustaches dripping beer, shaven lips in which the cigarettes were an anachronism. Here and there a group of dark-eyed women made one reflect that Italian charms were not yet wholly adapted to the modern costume. An old ragamuffin, beaked, withered, displaying the tusks and ear-rings of a brigand, shambled from table to table, croaking the praises of his basketful of oysters. Two fat fellows began to shout at each other across their glasses; strains from "Aida" pierced the din; a crash of dishes resounded.

"It's quieter at the Café Hirsch," remarked Aurelius, with a dazed smile. As no one heard him, he prepared to enter into the spirit of the hour.

Thallie's color was feverish; her eyes shone brilliantly; now and then a shivering laugh escaped her as Reginald, his elbow planted alongside of hers, whispered satirical comments on persons round about. Euphrosyne, on the contrary, was pale and serious. When Lieutenant Olivuzzi attempted a phrase, slowly, almost reluctantly, she turned

her face toward his, and their mutual gaze was fused by a questioning solemnity. Aglaia, catching Cyril Bellegram's eye, showed a rueful smile which seemed to say, "The garden would have pleased us better?" His response was not as warm as usual.

But in that pandemonium none could be staid for long. They made jokes which needed much translating before every one perceived the point. Fresh glasses appeared. Mr. Goodchild found a cigar between his fingers.

"Dad!"

"When in Rome, or, rather, in the Café Marco —"

He accepted a light, pursed his lips, blew a puff of smoke into the air, stared round him with a look half startled and half proud. His daughters watched him apprehensively.

"How odd! The taste is quite different from the smell."

Gradually a strange titillation penetrated Mr. Goodchild's brain, ran through his limbs, set his fingers and his toes to tingling. The lights revolved; a black cloth seemed flapping in mid-air; cold winds fanned his brow, which was suddenly bedewed with moisture. He swallowed spasmodically.

"Dad, you put down that cigar this instant!"

"Some water!" gasped Mr. Goodchild. And while he was recovering his full senses, he muttered feebly: "As Epictetus says, 'Every faculty is dangerous to the weak and uninstructed.' I've had my first and last experience in dissipation!"

To divert all minds from this misfortune, Reginald placed a hard-boiled egg on the neck of a water-bottle in which a scrap of paper had been set burning. All at once the egg was sucked into the carafe! Shouts of "Bravo!" exploded from the surrounding tables; the waiter raised his arms despairingly, and the old bandit, with a cry of amazement, let his oysters roll over the floor.

Just then they saw John Holland.

He was standing in the doorway, his tall, thick-set figure clad in homespun, his rugged face, which had never been handsome, deeply tanned, his calm eyes scanning the crowd with their habitual look of sophistication mingled with a subtle sympathy. Aurelius, springing forward, seized upon his hand.

"What a pleasure!" And waving excitedly toward the empty chair, "See, we've been keeping it for you!"

John Holland, after saluting the three Graces, took the ninth chair, and the circle was completed.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AGLAIA FINDS THAT WILL POWER CANNOT DO EVERYTHING

JOHAN HOLLAND was quartered in the Hotel Alexandra, on the Arno, not far from the Pension Schwandorf. He had expected to be in Florence only a day or two, yet he was staying out the week. The Goodchild family proved more interesting than Mme. Bertha Linkow and the rest at Montecatini.

Late in the afternoon he entered the pension, so familiar to all his senses with its coolness, its silences, its smells of antiquated stuffs; so prompt to evoke that melancholy which pervades a place where one has lived a different life and had another sort of thoughts. For a while, in the boudoir-office, he chatted with Mme. von Schwandorf of the past. Where was his old-time waiter? And the countess who had no change of dress, but flaunted a brave pair of diamond ear-rings? And the ancient lady in black bombazine who had danced with the last Emperor of France? Having learned that all were gone, remembering that he himself was nearly two decades advanced beyond those student-days, he strolled into the garden.

Aurelius was there. He had spent half the night perusing "The Six Cæsars" and "The History of Roman Literature." He was primed now for a score of learned arguments with Mr. Holland. "Did not Lucretius in his fifth book anticipate Darwin? Was the Saturnian meter of Latin or Etruscan origin? What was the real cause of

Ovid's banishment?" But John Holland, in vacation-time, preferred to forget that he was a historian. Aurelius soon found himself telling of his life in Zenasville.

He pictured that homestead artlessly, in all its humbleness. One saw the ramshackle studio, the supper-table, the neglected garden. One seemed to hear, in the silence of spring afternoons, a four-fold sigh of longing for the great world of opportunity. One felt the excitement of that moment when the postman blew his whistle in the dusky lane.

"So the future of our dreams drew near at last. Perhaps we'd wished for it so intensely that many beautiful seasons in the time of waiting had escaped our notice. Now, looking back, I can see that every day was precious. It isn't right to live so that one appreciates a period only in retrospect."

The three Graces appeared in the glass corridor.

They drew near, fresh in their evening dresses, which clung to three forms unlike except in youth's free, supple movement. When they greeted the visitor, half diffident at his celebrity, half eager to be intimate with fame, the three faces, framed in three shades of red hair, were lifted toward his like so many blossoms, and a mingled fragrance, of simple sachets, of rich tresses, of almost adolescent corporeal purity, rejoiced his heart. When they were seated round the tea-table, their poses all maintained a vague expectancy.

Cyril Bellegram came in, and Reginald Dux, and Olivuzzi, with Lieutenant Fava. Mr. Holland invited all of them to dinner.

They drove to a restaurant in the suburbs, where tables were laid on a terrace overlooking the wide countryside, where the white-haired proprietor recognized John Holland with a cry of pleasure, and the waiters began to run around

like rabbits. Whatever the sisters ate was delicious; even the spaghetti seemed different from that of every day. Twilight fell; arc-lamps sputtered overhead; below the railing fireflies twinkled in the tree-tops; and from the horizon, sinking into obscurity beneath one long, horizontal strip of purple, an extraordinary wistfulness stole in to them. For a time they were silent. Afar, a clear voice soared to the warm notes of a love-song, and, still throbbing, was lost in the immensity of the night.

"It's too late for nightingales," they repeated, with regret.

"But the moon will soon be rising."

The moon rose; Thallie's eyes turned to Reginald, and Olivuzzi's to Euphrosyne. Aglaia secretly considered Mr. Holland.

He leaned back in his chair. His large frame expressed repose and power. His face was composed as usual, but his eyes were softened, as much, it seemed, by sadness as by sympathy. He was watching Thallie, who, laughing while Reginald made jokes that smacked of vaudeville-shows, let her fair young shape lean toward the young man as a flower inclines itself toward the sun.

But at last Aglaia's gaze attracted Holland's. Instantly that expression in his eyes gave place to blankness. In Florence just as in Geneva, his sympathy, despite her subtlest efforts, did not extend to her as to the rest.

Later, when brooding on this fact once more Aglaia felt uneasy. Her ideas in regard to sentimental triumphs were at fault: there were men whom one could not inveigle into interest? What was the reason? Antipathy due to their unfriendly stars? Or was it that this one had fathomed all her artfulness? Perhaps he had long since learned from sore experience to sense the first approach of feminine chicanery? And though she had not the slightest personal

regard for him, Aglaia felt jealous of those unknown women who had taught him to be wary; she found him still worthier of pursuit; she was more eager than ever to wring from him, somehow, an acknowledgment of her seductiveness.

But next day John Holland came to the pension to say good-by.

"Going!" cried Mr. Goodchild in dismay.

"Oh, I shall be back. Indeed, my work will keep me all winter in the neighborhood of Rome."

"That's different." And, a twinkle lighting up his faded eyes, "That permits me to go on living in anticipation."

John Holland bade the Graces farewell. When he came to Thallie, he said, "I don't think much of your Monsieur Alphonse Zolande. You'll permit me to recommend another painting-teacher?" When he had done so, turning to Aglaia, "Mughetto, however, is excellent. I feel sure he'd do his best in any case, but I've asked him to take a special interest in you." And to Frossie: "I ordered you a few books on writing. You may find something in them, here and there, that has n't yet occurred to you." With one more kindly smile he left the Goodchild family at the gate: and the garden, even to Thallie, seemed like a place from which some fine expansive foliage had withdrawn its shelter.

But Thallie soon forgot Mr. Holland, in wondering if Reginald would call that afternoon.

Nearly every day he appeared from the vicinity of Quarto, where, with his friend Hector Ghillamoor, he was staying at the villa of a Baron di Campoformio. The latter, who had married an American, a cousin of the Ghillamoors, was now, in his early thirties, a widower. An ardent aviator, he possessed two *aéroplanes*. Since October had brought cooler weather, Hector Ghillamoor, at night playing cards

and drinking in a pergola, in the daytime soaring high above the hills, was willing to stay on at the Villa Campofornio.

Reginald Dux was ready to remain near Florence for another reason.

Idle, with no intellectual hobbies, his mind was often invaded by romantic thoughts. He enjoyed foreign travel, which meant to him smart hotels, bright-eyed ladies from Latin and Slavonic countries, the possibility of "affairs." He dreamed at times of a tempestuous adventure with some *grande amoureuse* out of contemporary French fiction, whom he followed, in reverie, through half of Europe, and finally embraced on a marble terrace redolent of *Olea fragans* bloom, preferably above the moonlit waters of Lake Como. He understood the young man in "Princess Aline" who crossed the ocean to look on the original of a fair photograph—though Reginald, if fate were kind enough to let him imitate that deed, would contrive a different ending to the tale. Once, viewing a cinematograph play that dealt with the Punic Wars, he had felt an inclination to travel to Turin, where that production had been staged, to seek out and win the woman who moved through those tableaux in the costume of a Carthaginian princess, and who, with her lissome body wrapped in painted robes, with her black hair braided in an antique style, with her white face and large eyes, had seemed for the moment the epitome of all that he desired.

But before he could rouse himself to go in search of her that fascination had been superseded by another.

Of course he had found opportunity closer to his hand. There had been some indiscreet ladies of his own society, and disclassed fellow-countrywomen living abroad, and actresses of a certain sort, and the sirens with the pernicious freshness of jungle orchids who let their elaborate dresses

trail through the press of gambling-casinos and along the esplanades of bathing-beaches. And at home there had also been one little girl in a patched shirt-waist and worn shoes whom he had met in the haze of an undergraduate adventure, and who had wept "because he was different."

Yet beneath his chaffing, nonchalant demeanor, his real nature, his legacy of sensitiveness,—the traits that might have made him, with a less successful father, a practitioner in some emotional art,—suspected that all his heart-affairs were woefully undramatic in analysis. Still, dauntless because so young, he went on looking for the great experience; and because he was no more than twenty-six years old, at the approach of every woman who seemed beautiful, elegant, and more mature than he, Reginald asked himself, "Perhaps this is the one at last?"

Certainly the creature of his ideals had never at any time resembled Thallie.

Thallie did not even resemble the girls of his own class, those young women whose simplicity of dress was nearly always artful, whose manners were subtly tintured with sophistication, whose theoretical knowledge of the world seemed nearly to keep pace with masculine experience. At first she had amused him, like the heroine in a romance of rural setting, naïve, warm, natural, with the sweetness of a wild-flower, which, to be sure, one best appreciates when the mind is cleared of an enthusiasm for more complex blossoms. But, then, for the moment Reginald was sentimentally at liberty.

His sense of humor, rejoicing in what he would have called the quaintness of the Goodchild family, had led him presently into a sort of tenderness toward Thallie such as he often felt for the defenseless and the young, if to defenselessness and youth was added beauty. And, in fact,

whenever he looked intently at her, he had to admit that of her special type she was a well-nigh flawless specimen.

She sat in a wicker chair against the hanging roses, her batiste collar rolling open from the neck, one pink, lax palm upturned on her round knee, her little white slippers close together on the gravel. Those calls—her shy punctilio, her innocent self-revelation, her attempts at wise discussion, which seemed invariably out of place—reminded him somehow of a doll's tea-party. And yet, when he scrutinized her fair, pure skin, her ripe mouth, the mingled slenderness and plumpness of her form, he felt a swift impulse to seize her face between his hands and ravish her lips. Light-haired himself, the ideal of his romantic dreams had always been brunette, interestingly pale, with raven locks and large black eyes, as lithe as a beast of prey, in every pose expressing the soul-weariness of a Russian adventuress in a Broadway melodrama. It was refreshing for Reginald to learn that he could feel this way "toward blondes." The discovery enlarged the horizon of his possibilities: he derived from it, as it were, a greater sense of competence.

And Thallie flattered him by a sort of deference that he had imagined ended in these days of careless manners. And Thallie seemed more than just diverted by his visits. And presently he felt that if he did seize her flowerlike face between his hands, did drink of those ripe lips, all her shyness would melt into the enervation of surrender, all her apparent adolescence might be transformed into the fervor of maturity. When Hector Ghillamoor suggested moving north, it was Reginald, the notorious victim of periodic boredom, who held out for a longer stay in drowsy Florence.

Ghillamoor, his herculean form stretched on a sofa in the Villa Campoformio, his face of a young gladiator showing its customary sulky smile, turned to one week more

So Reginald's calls continued at the pension; and Lieutenant Olivuzzi, who often met him there, took it for granted that he was going to marry Thallie.

Camillo Olivuzzi was at liberty, outside the army, to call himself a count, owing to a custom which, in some Italian provinces, permitted all the sons of petty nobles to assume the same title as the father. His parents lived with their younger children in the depths of the Abruzzi, in a dwelling half-castle and half-farm, without modern conveniences, surrounded by slipshod servants who behaved like humble members of the family, with difficulty making both ends meet. The old Count Olivuzzi derived a slender living from his land, which source of revenue he believed to be the only one a gentleman might profit by. However, he counseled his sons to marry money; and every summer, after going thin and threadbare for ten months at home, the parents convoyed their daughters to the fashionable resorts, where for some weeks they managed to live like persons well-to-do while parading the girls before eligible young men from Rome and Milan. Their savings spent, they trailed back for another hibernation in their rickety castle, donned the old costumes by which the peasantry had long recognized them from afar, resumed their diet of *polenta*, sausages, and family bread, and, without books or intellectual companionship, awaited, like the hope of resurrection, next spring's extravagances.

Camillo had escaped that life.

He had gone for three years to the military school at Modena, then two years to the cavalry school at Pinerolo, and finally had done his course at Tor di Quinto, where cavalry cadets received the finishing touch. During that time, because of the exceptional social benefits bestowed upon young cavalry officers, Camillo had replaced his rural awkwardnesses with an excellent set of manners. Also, the

Tripoli War breaking out in his first year with the Magenta Regiment, he had learned, in the wastes of Libya, invaluable lessons both of patience and initiative, had proved his spirit, and acquired the poise of those who have come hand to hand with death.

But after warfare what could be more tedious than garrison-life!

Every morning at half-past four the trumpets sounded the *risveglio*; every night at nine they blew the *ritirata*. In the forenoon the barrack-yard was full of dust-clouds, through which appeared clumps of sweating men in olive-gray, all moving in unison to the shouts, "*Plotone, avanti — marc'! Destra riga! Sinistra riga! Plotone — alt! Pied' — arm'!*" And so on again, again and again. In the afternoon, unless a practice-march was ordered, one might have to superintend the cleaning of the horses, tethered in long lines, curried by cavalymen in barrack-jackets and round caps. At vespers one sallied out through the whitewashed gate,—after glancing toward the full-length mirror in the vestibule,—to call perhaps on some shabby-genteel Florentine aristocrat, or stand a while before the Nobles' Club. One dined with other lieutenants at an inexpensive restaurant, for there was no regimental mess. In the evening, when the chance of recreation had been defeated for the most part by economy, one returned at last to the bare bedroom in the barracks, and, motionless by the window in the dark, heard the wailing call of the *silenzio*, saw all the lights but one in each dormitory go out, and realized that this day, identical with the rest, was finished.

His fellow-officers were well-mannered young men, with the bodies of athletes and the brains of dandies, dare-devil riders, eager gamblers, great amateurs of women, unmoral, yet likable, now energetic and now indolent, by nature

callous and by impulse generous. All were well-bred, and many had titles of nobility. Most had entered the army, the only honorable business that occurred to them, to escape in some measure the futile existence of their class. Few, however, had any thought of rising high in their profession, or even of continuing in it for long unless the Austrians threatened to come down at last. Made as if expressly for love, war, and fatalism, they were, like much in modern Italy, out of date, as if they contained the souls of those gay, lazy, ruthless young gallants of the Middle Ages who had been their ancestors.

But Camillo Olivuzzi was of a different fiber. Perhaps the old fortress of his fathers had bestowed on him something of its bleak simplicity, just as the Abruzzi gorges may have influenced his nature with their rugged strength. The lean early years, the loneliness of those hills, had brought him a host of thoughts almost ascetic in their seriousness. The flighty comrades of his military life had not altered the intentions of his boyhood days — to rise high in the service of his country, to remain always the cavalier without fear and without reproach, to find as soon as possible the good woman worthy to be the mother of his children.

One day, in Via Tornabuoni, he had seen Euphrosyne.

He had seen a girl whose fresh coloring and bright-red hair appealed, with a delightful novelty, to all that was wholesome in his character, whose firm features suggested sanity, cheerfulness, and high ideals, whose good, healthy figure, foreshadowing a matronly solidity, seemed fashioned to withstand the charge of happy babies. And instantly he had thought, with that thrill which accompanies the predestined crises of a life, "Whoever she is, wherever she comes from, here is the one whom I can marry!"

Acquaintance with her had not abated that conviction.

Speaking in her own tongue, she told him of Zenasville.

But from her story he derived impressions of a neat village such as he had seen portrayed in English photographs, exhaling quaintness from ancient hedges and Elizabethan roof-trees, where, down mature green vistas, one perceived young people, white-clad, clustered beside a cricket-field. He, speaking Italian, told her of the Abruzzi. She constructed from those descriptions a craggy landscape full of waterfalls and abandoned lairs of brigands, a sort of paradise out of a fairy-tale, crowned with a ruddy castle in the style of Maxfield Parrish. Yet, after all, each saw those regions merely as a poetic setting for the speaker.

Frossie, in a tone of raillery that was only half successful, ventured:

"Up there in your mountains some one is pining for you, I suppose, like the damsel in old story-books?"

"No, Signorina," he exclaimed emphatically. "But in your Zenasville, no doubt?"

Looking down, she shook her head. He was not satisfied.

"I understand that in America a girl may have been engaged half a dozen times?"

Meeting his gaze directly, she responded:

"At least I know I should not engage myself to marry unless it was going to be for life."

"Till death do part, not so?" Camillo quoted in English, his smile returning.

"Till death do part," she echoed, with an attempt to imitate that smile. But a chill passed through her heart, as when a cloud suddenly obscures the sun.

"Tell me again," she besought him presently, "of that day when you were ambushed in the oasis." And at the conclusion of the tale she sat for a while wide-eyed and solemn, thinking, "Thank Heaven, he ran those risks before I knew him!"

She was glad that Camillo was a soldier; she was impressed every day by the romantic aura which makes young men who are dedicated to warfare so attractive to young women; she would not under any circumstances have wished him a civilian — yet she prayed that he might never see a battlefield again.

Now, nearly every afternoon, the pension garden took on a military aspect. Lieutenant Fava, with his bony jaws, his squint, his rat-tail mustaches, always manœuvered for a chair near Thallie, to spin for her, in fluent French, long, sanguinary yarns of Sicily, his native land. And still another lieutenant of the Magenta Cavalry had slipped into that circle, a youth from Lombardy, named Azeglio. Despite his Northern fairness, it was pale-haired Aglaia whom he approached with all his Latin gallantries. Reginald Dux, with a sour smile, suggested to Thallie that the three lieutenants must have signed a protocol restricting each to one of the three Graces.

The tea-table was still laid beneath the palm-tree. Against the bamboo thickets the light dresses and smart uniforms composed a charming tableau. Cyril Bellegram halted in the glass corridor, glared at that scene, then stalked off to his bedroom.

“Wretched foreigners! I leave this hole to-morrow!”

But Cyril Bellegram had made that resolution several times of late, only to break it. However, he was used to compromises with his nature.

In a family of strong, unimaginative, formal sons, he was the queer one. A taint of degeneracy had predisposed him to the admiration and the practice of the fine arts, while excluding from his nature a virility which would have made endeavor in those arts effective. Worse still, any pleasure that he took in writing music, sketching, tinkering with Latin odes and English sonnets, was abated by his training,

to the effect that artists of all sorts were very well in their own way, but hardly patterns for an English country gentleman.

His natural timidity, his expectation of brusque ridicule, his nervous fear of being thought still more peculiar, restrained him, so long as he remained at home, to an artificial life. His distress was only relieved by solitary walks among the hills of Devonshire.

Then, at least, he could be himself, he could believe at times that he was greater than himself. On those uplands, where brisk winds calmed his nerves, and all things incongruous with his nature were lost in the haze of distance, his heart expanded with ambitions as splendid as the swift, bright clouds. Ah, to fix imperishably these thoughts that came to him like great birds from a region of celestial beauty! To imprison them within some noble medium — to make a canvas glow with them, or shape them into a sonorous poem, or compose a symphony to which the whole world would listen!

Or, maybe, as he returned across the moors, there descended toward him through the dusk a lovely face, the like of which he had never seen in life, as full of sweet promises as the countenance of Astarte crowned with stars. And standing still, not daring to take another step toward home and crass reality, he would lose himself for a while in dreams.

But finally he would see again, outlined against the evening sky, the twelve chimneys of his father's house. He would enter the "great hall," where foxes' masks were nailed against the wainscot, where hunting-crops and golf-clubs filled the corners, and a brother or two, in stock and riding-breeches, sat teasing the dogs that lolled around the hearth. At once he became again, as much as possible, the English country gentleman.

It was on his foreign journeys that he was happiest.

His allowance in his pocket, he bade good-by to convention, and took the road with the gay expectancy of a Bohemian. But, alas! in every hotel-pension convention rose before him in the person of some fellow-countryman, to whose humdrum point of view he must conform. And even in native taverns he felt an invincible obligation to uphold before those foreigners the conservatism of the British Isles.

Yet there were moments when he had thrown off decorum with a desperate gesture, as a young gallant might let slip his cloak in some enchanted garden, beneath the high window, half open to romance, that is reached by a ladder of vines heavy with aromatic blossoms. And he would never regret those hours like elopements into a different world, resonant with hoof-beats, illumined by the window-lights of passing chalets, perfumed by youth and beauty close beside him, though the object of that flight was only some hilltop restaurant, though the romance, if analyzed, would doubtless have been contaminated by a mercenary motive, though the whole adventure cost a week, a month perhaps, of cheaper pensions, of grosser tobacco, of third-class instead of second-class compartments.

But he hoped, also, for a meeting that could have lifelong consequences; and the face that he had seen on the Devon moors returned with a more complicated loveliness, contained the beauty of every woman who had stimulated the creation of a work of art. "Yes," he would think, without blushing, without remembering that by inheritance he was an English country gentleman, "she must exist somewhere in this world, the one who was meant to be my inspiration." And he pictured a woman content to live with him, "the world well lost," in some such remote, exotic villa as affords the closing scenes for certain novels of Mr.

H. G. Wells, who would give up her life to encouraging his talents and to sympathizing with his quirks, who would keep all silent in the house while he composed his masterpieces, and then at twilight, entering softly in a sort of preraphaelite negligee, would read the last pages, examine the last brush-strokes, hear the last chords, and lay her cool hand across his feverish brow, and utter every time, in a voice like water rustling through iris-stalks, "But that is genius!"

Others had found such paragons, so why not he?

Meanwhile, he dreamed of fine works instead of getting at them, like the man in Ibsen's play who lay all day on a sofa waiting for wonderful ideas, without anything definite in mind. When his conscience reproached him for his idle life, Cyril retorted that he had not yet found his inspiration.

But at last, in the Pension Schwandorf, he had found Aglaia.

They seemed to think alike on every topic. A new sense of peace pervaded him when she agreed with all his views. He soon felt that she at least would not ridicule his secret aspirations. He believed finally that this was the only woman in the world who could appreciate him.

As he contemplated her clear-cut profile, her lustrous copper-colored tresses, her whole dainty person that was enveloped with the scent of mignonette, a mist rose before his eyes till her face took on the ambiguity of the ideal. And Cyril, who prided himself on a nice appreciation of all charming things, no longer saw Aggie as she had looked at first.

He wanted to pour out all his despairs and hopes for her, unload on her shoulders his countless fancied troubles, beseech her to be, if nothing more, his guiding star. But next day, when she bestowed that gentle, comprehending smile

on Olivuzzi, or Azeglio, or Reginald Dux, Cyril marched to his room, threw some shirts into his trunk, determined to "leave her to her just deserts" among these aliens. Like many persons at once egotistical and timid, he was seized with a violent agitation at the first hint of rivalry.

Aglaia always found a way to calm him.

When the suitors were gathered, if only she could catch his eye, she sent him a secret glance, as who should say, "When shall you and I be free for a talk that's really worth while!" Sometimes, when the rest were gone, she made a grimace, heaved a sigh of relief, fixed her gaze on Cyril with a veiled sweetness which confessed, "But with you I don't think I'd ever feel that way." And once more, as in times when the garden had been less popular, they sat down for a tête-à-tête beneath the palmetto palm.

One evening he had in his pocket a poem composed that day on a terrace at Fiesole. Of a sudden, obedient to one of those impulses by which sentimentalists are betrayed, he read it to Aggie.

"O Pearl of Astoreth, O Splendor of the Moon,
O Young Palm Swaying in the Breeze, O Flawless Lute,
O Coffer of Sweet Odors Beyond Price, so soon
Torments of resting mute!

"For thou must still be thou, and I must still be I,
And thirst may not quench thirst, nor echoes comfort crying:
What does the desert do, beneath its brazen sky,
Even to heal men dying?

"Life is the endless chain with pearls and pebbles strung:
Pearls that we once left cold slip round again afire;
That which we long for most grew, while the world was young,
Into the great desire."

There were more verses, all designed to prove that the writer and the Pearl of Astoreth, having known each other

intimately in some previous incarnation, must now fall into each other's arms again.

After a moment's silence, Aglaia declared in hushed accents that Keats had never done better. But presently:

"What foreign ambassador is it who writes such beautiful poetry? How splendid it must be to shine like that, with equal brilliance in two spheres! His diplomatic successes offset his literary triumphs; his poetic traits are pardoned by the most conservative, because of his statesmanship. By the way, have you thought any more about the foreign service?"

"I'd go in for it," he replied, "if you advised me to."

"Do it, then."

"By Jove, I will!" cried Cyril, so sharply that Bristles, the Irish terrier, scrambled to his feet. Aggie, to seal the bargain, held out her slim, cool hand.

"Remember, I shall keep you to that resolution. For I want to see you use not one, but all, of your talents. I want to be very proud of you—"

She stopped there, released her hand from his, looked away as one does who has been tempted to reveal too much.

"Whatever I accomplish," Cyril responded huskily, "I shall owe it all to you. Before I met you I was drifting, sick of the world and myself, like Tolstoy in his youth, who went so far, one day, as to set out across the fields, to kill himself from sheer disgust! But now, nothing seems too difficult or too remote for me to gain. Why is it?"

He leaned forward, his thin, neurotic young face disorganized by his emotion, his black forelock dangling between his gleaming eyes. She rose. In the shadows her hand touched his like the faintest possible caress. As she left him she murmured:

"Whatever it is just now, you will forget all this when you are famous."

"Forget!" He sprang to his feet, he pursued her to the door of the glass corridor. "Aglaia, wait! I want to tell you — I want to say —"

"Look out. Some one's watching us from that window."

She slipped into the house.

In her bedroom she thought: "That was clumsy of me. He must n't propose till I've made up my mind."

She knew by this time that Cyril was not the stuff from which ambassadors are made. By good management, however, he might at least become the secretary of an embassy. But even to wear the court regalia of a secretary's wife — the three plumes, the veil of tulle, the four-yard train — Aggie would not now be willing to give up the operatic stage. For she had found in Florence a new singing-teacher, a witty, convincing little man named Chiamorino, who had promised that in two years, with twenty-franc lessons only twice a week, her soprano would be "a sensation, equal, perhaps, to Melba's."

She might make a wiser match if she waited till she was famous?

"Oh, as for that, one can always divorce a husband that one's outgrown! And in the meantime —"

She recalled a certain raw spring afternoon on the highway outside of Zenasville, when her sisters had voiced their discontent, when she herself had said, in effect, "But I am nearly thirty years old, with one whole side of life still a closed book."

While rubbing cold-cream on her nose, Aglaia paused to appraise the rest of the three Graces' court.

Camillo Olivuzzi would doubtless make the most impassioned lover; but Camillo could hardly be won away from Frossie. Besides, their titles notwithstanding, these cavalry officers were too poor for an ambitious girl to bother with.

Cyril Bellegram, to be sure, was poor himself; but, as his family was rich, a baby ought to bring a handsome settlement. Reginald Dux, on the other hand, would be a splendid catch. But Aggie, after studying that young man well with her clear emerald eyes, had concluded that he would no more marry into the Goodchild family than he would hang himself.

"By the way, I really ought to tell Thallie so, poor kid!"

Reginald saved her that trouble by taking his departure.

Hector Ghillamoor's eight-year-old daughter had fallen ill in Paris. The telegram reached the Villa Campoformio at dinner-time, and Reginald at once returned to town to say good-by to Thallie. He found the family taking coffee in the garden.

When he had given the reason for his leaving, there passed like a flash through Thallie's mind the bitter conviction, "He's going to comfort that black-haired woman of the Cherbourg tender, that hateful Mrs. Ghillamoor!" Moreover, he would regain that region of night restaurants and music-halls, full of ugly, fascinating, wanton girls who leaned their bare shoulders against pillars and responded to chaffing with peculiar looks. She thought, "If you ever do that again, it must be all over between us!" But since he stood here hat in hand, his cab at the gate, his baggage by this time at the station, was it not all over between them now?

All the life seemed to leave her body. She could hardly lift her arm to meet his hand-clasp. She did not dare to speak.

He whispered:

"Walk to the corner with me."

She found herself beside him in the dusky street.

Mr. Goodchild would have joined them there, to add a polish to his oration of farewell; but Frossie pulled him back

into the garden. As the gate swung shut, Thallie heard her sister whisper:

"O Dad, do give the child —"

The young man drew Thallie toward the corner.

"So it's *au revoir* again," he said, looking down at her through the gloom with a gay, tender, patronizing smile.

"*Au revoir?*"

Her voice broke on those words. She knew that her mouth, half open, must be distorted.

"Did you think for a moment that I was n't coming back?"

She only stared at him, her chin up, her hands clasped before her breast as if in an attitude of prayer. And her immobility that was so significant, her eyes that showed through the darkness all their secret, the sweet contagion that her presence spread around, bewitched the young man like a fulfilment of his most romantic reveries. Now, if ever, he wanted to snatch her into his embrace, cover her face with kisses. Not on some marble balcony above Lake Como, but in a prosaic street, beside a pension; not in the presence of some *grande amoureuse* out of contemporary French fiction, but before a girl whose naïveté had formerly amused him, Reginald Dux, the rich, the socially prominent, the highly eligible, felt a moment of divine insanity, was on the point of uttering the fatal words: "Cost what it may, it's you that I must have! Come with me! Marry me to-night!"

But of a sudden he remembered an American country house built in imitation of a European summer palace. He saw, in a white-stone room adorned with crimson chairs, his mother's face, thin, cold, domineering, pitiless toward anything opposed to her ambitions. He regained his senses as if a bucket of cold water had been thrown over him.

They found themselves beside the waiting cab. With

one foot on the step, he felt his aplomb returning. Half embarked, he could risk another sentimental shot for the satisfaction of kindling again in Thallie's face that glow of joy.

"Separation from all this," said he, including the house-front, the garden wall, the stars, and her in one wide, graceful gesture, "will make me count the hours till I'm back." He took her hand again. "Meanwhile, think of me sometimes, what?"

Through a mist of tears she watched the cab bowl down the street.

The days that followed were scarcely less exquisite than when he had been present. In Florence Thallie discovered the delicious sadness of a place from which the beloved has departed. Sure that he would return before separation had become unbearable, she experienced the luxury of a romantic loneliness. She walked out of her way to pass the tobacco shop where they had met again. She took tea in Giacinta's because he had sat there beside her. From the studio window in Via de' Bardi she gazed forth across the city toward Quarto, murmuring: "Poor lonely hills! He has left you, too!"

She went on with her painting, which showed the energy that love imparts to creative work. M. Alphonse Zolande expressed amazement at her progress.

Though October was drawing to a close, the painting master had not yet found another pupil. Even his famous patroness, Princess Tchernitza, remained away from Florence; it seemed that she was "visiting her Bulgarian estates." Thallie began to wonder if this personage, like the winter students, was a myth.

She recalled John Holland's advice that she change painting-teachers. Her pity for M. Zolande prevented such a step.

Thallie had found out that he was a counterfeiter of old masters. His secret bared, he had thrown himself upon her generosity. All his life, he protested, fate had been against him: his original work had been too subtle for the public. So finally, in desperation, he had embraced this chance to live.

As he stood there in his purple velveteen coat and shabby shoes, so lean and leathery and gray, pathetically resembling the great painter Gérôme, Thallie could scarcely find it in her heart to blame him. When she remembered that once upon a time he had been expected to do well, when she imagined him as he must have been in those brave, boyish days, her eyes grew moist, she determined not to think of picture-counterfeiting as dishonest. And presently it no longer seemed dishonest.

Then she took a guilty sort of pleasure in his cleverness, while he explained to her how he had found the formulas by which the old masters worked; for instance, the Venetian secret, the use of the three colors, and the peculiar benefits of sunlight.

At Mr. Goodchild's step outside the door, they thrust the counterfeits under the divan.

Aurelius, because of his many projects and preoccupations, seldom reached the studio before Thallie had set out for home. But no matter how late he was, he always climbed the four flights of stairs to make sure.

One day while he was toiling up the third staircase, harsh voices burst forth from the landing overhead: M. Zolande and a caller were quarreling in French. Aurelius, reluctantly arriving at the studio door, saw the painting teacher confronted by a swarthy man in a battered straw hat and a greenish suit, with kinky mustaches bristling about his flat vermilion lips.

It was the Greek whom the Goodchild family had taken

for an assassin in the train. It was "M. Constantine Farazounis, antiques, curiosities, commissions, box 387, general post-office, Naples."

The recognition was mutual.

Constantine Farazounis spread out his arms, batted his thickly fringed eyelids, gave vent to a cry of delight, pounced upon Mr. Goodchild's hand.

"My gentleman! You here?"

"By a happy chance," Aurelius explained, "to escort my daughter, who has the advantage of studying art with Monsieur Zolande."

The painting-teacher vouchsafed in somber tones:

"Mademoiselle is gone, Monsieur."

"Ah," stammered Aurelius, "in that case —"

"One second, my sir! I shall go with you," Constantine Farazounis announced enthusiastically. Over his shoulder, in rapid French, in quite another voice, to Zolande, who was watching with a gloomy, grudging air, "Remember, next time a customer scrapes a Titian and finds no reddish-silvery foundation, you will hunt up another market!" And the curio-dealer conveyed Mr. Goodchild to the street with as much care as if he had in hand something very fragile and precious.

Aurelius was overwhelmed by so much courtesy. He remembered with a pang the wrong he had done this honest fellow on the way from Milan. He was determined to make amends at once for past injustice. He invited M. Farazounis to the pension for lunch.

The other shook his head benevolently.

"No, my sir. It is I who must be the hospitable to-day. Let us go to some chic restaurant."

Out of diffidence, Mr. Goodchild suggested his old haunt, the Café Hirsch. There, while Aurelius was telephoning his excuses to the pension, the Greek ordered a lunch that

turned the kitchen upside-down. Otto, the bald-headed Swiss waiter, who had not served a meal like this, outside of dreams, for many a day, presented the courses with a flourish.

After polishing several plates and downing a flask of wine, M. Farazounis washed his mouth with coffee, picked his glistening teeth, grew confidential.

Business had not been good. These days there were so many false antiques for sale that people had grown suspicious even of the most impeccable affidavits. He, for his part, had some wonderful objects that he could not dispose of just on that account — a collection of Homeric jewelry, a dozen flawless examples of pre-Hyksos pottery, a marble Hermes by a pupil of Praxiteles, dug up from a cellar in the suburbs of Athens. But never mind; he had another iron in the fire, a project that would make him, at a single coup, a millionaire. Leaning across the table, pointing a dirty forefinger at Mr. Goodchild's nose, he whispered hoarsely:

"What would you say, my gentleman, if I knowed where to put the hand on the treasures of an ancient dynasty?"

"Good Lord!" Aurelius gasped, a shiver running down his spine. "In a pyramid?"

"There, now I have sayed too much." He peered distrustfully at Otto, whose round pink face, ordinarily so mournful, wore at last an expression of grandeur. "That waiter, for example, to-morrow he may serve some German archæologist. No, another time, when we are quite alone. I will tell you all, my sir; you will see how I trust you even with that secret. For I can read human natures! I can see when a gentleman is worthy to know my all! Meantimes, let us act natural." And, in loud, careless tones, "You are come often to this little café?"

"Nearly every afternoon."

"Excuse; then I must join you now and then."

"I trust, sir, you'll also honor the Pension Schwandorf with a call or two."

Again the Greek shook his head, with a deprecating smile.

"When you know me better, when I have proved my worth."

This delicacy charmed Aurelius.

"And what, my sir, are you doing here in Florence?"

"Just now I am busy on a literary work, a tragic poem."

He had the manuscript with him. M. Farazounis insisted on his reading it.

The hero, *Rodolfo*, had got himself by this time into a frightful fix. The hirelings of *Piero de' Medici* had dragged him into a dungeon; the tyrant himself, disguised in a mask, was about to burn out the prisoner's fine eyes, which had looked so fondly on the winsome *Fiammetta*. The climax ran:

But hark, above the hissing of that hellish crew

A scream of mortal anguish pierced Rodolfo through,

And 'gainst those portals grim, fast barred to God's fair world,

A slender form in wild abandon then was hurled.

"Rodolfo!" rang the cry, one pure soul to its mate,

"'T is Fiammetta come to share thy awful fate."

She was admitted to the torture-chamber by *Piero*, who laughed, in horrible accents:

"Place Fiammetta there, attentive at his side,

So she may see him die — then be my swooning bride!"

But out of doors her old nurse, who had hobbled after her, set up the cry, "The Pisan army marches on the town!"

Now some howled, "All is lost," some, "Treason," others, "Death!"

And that grim devils' lair was emptied in a breath.

So once again unscathed the trembling lovers stood,

And Heav'n adjudged the scale in favor of the good.

But only temporarily.

When Aurelius had sketched out the conclusion of the work, M. Farazounis rolled his thickly fringed eyes in ecstasy. Otto chose this moment to lay the bill before him.

The host felt in all his pockets, half rose from his chair, looked blank.

His purse was gone!

Mr. Goodchild settled for the splendid lunch.

"And it was to be my hospitality!" moaned the Greek.

"Remember, though, that I suggested it in the first place."

"That's so," Farazounis assented, with a sigh.

But the curio-dealer could not forget the disappearance of his purse. Some pickpocket must have got it!

"Why, that happened to you once before, in the station at Milan the day I met you first."

"Ah, yes. It seems to be my fate, always suffering some of these misfortunes at the hands of rogues."

The Greek went his way depressed. And Aurelius, because he did not walk straight home, missed Mme. Bertha Linkow's second call.

Indeed, the prima donna found nobody at the pension but Aggie. The latter sustained four strenuous kisses, one for each sister and one for "that exasperating papa," whom the singer vowed she did not expect to see again this side of heaven. They sat down in the parlor beside the pianoforte.

Mme. Linkow intended to leave in a fortnight for New York; in December she was to sing her first opera of the season, at the Metropolitan.

"As *Gilda*, my dear. Tra-la-la. Tra-la-la-a-a-la! Tra-la-la-la-a-a-a! And so forth. Do you think my shape is going to be sufficiently girlish? God knows, every morning I lie on my bed and wave my legs in the air till my groans draw a crowd in the corridor!" Jumping up, she

turned her large figure round for Aglaia's inspection, while her fair, wholesome face, with its frame of corn-colored hair, was depressed by a little girl's look of concern. But abruptly she brandished her fist and cried in a hearty, resolute tone: "Bah! I shall open my throat, and they will forget my corporations. All the same, if I had your figure, now! With, maybe, a little more chest. Tell me, how is the voice coming on?" Her restless glance was attracted by the piano. "By the way! Here we are all alone with this noble wreck of a Milanese tin pot. Perhaps you would feel like singing me a nice little song?"

A chill weakened Aglaia's limbs; but she rose, with lips compressed, and approached the piano. The moment of vital criticism had come at last. As she took her place on the stool, she repeated to herself, "I have nothing to be afraid of. I'm going to be great, anyway. But I'll make her see how great I'm going to be."

She sang the "Vissi d'arte" from "Tosca."

A long silence ensued. At last, turning round, she stared at Mme. Linkow.

The prima donna sat gazing at the floor. Her face seemed like a stranger's, with its sad smile, as if some one had just told her an old pathetic story that she knew already by heart. She inquired in a gentle way:

"Mughetto is not teaching you now?"

"I have a new man, a Signore Chiamorino."

"Signore Chiamorino? Yes, he is well known. He makes his living deceiving young American girls with vain hopes."

Again Aglaia felt that chill, and knew it now for a sickening premonition.

"He — told me that in two years —"

"Of course. And you, with those green eyes so clever at seeing through men, made yourself believe this one be-

cause you wanted that what he said should come true. *Ach, Gott*, as do all the rest who desire! My poor little Aggie, if I am cruel now, you will maybe forgive me some day. All I can say is this: if ever you had any voice, it is gone."

That same afternoon, in a daze that was like a nightmare, Aggie flew back to Valentino Mughetto.

The man-servant in his striped yellow waistcoat ushered her into the stone reception-room, with its antique chairs, the Donatello bust on the mantel-shelf, the majolica vase on the table. The singing-master appeared in the doorway, gigantic, his body like a half-deflated balloon, his inky beard spread over his coat-lapels like a fan. Again those black eyes of his comprehended her person in one swift flash, and plunged, as it were, to the very depths of her soul.

"So, since the three months are up, the signorina returns?"

"Yes, Maestro," she breathed, and laid her hand on a chair-back.

His pear-shaped face turned redder; his eyes showed a gleam like anger.

"Say that again," he demanded.

Aglaia could not utter a word.

Moving swiftly forward, he ordered, in tones that rang from the walls:

"Speak!"

"I said, 'Yes, Maestro.'"

Valentino Mughetto, with frigid politeness, remarked:

"Signorina, your voice informs me that though I told you not to sing one note, you have sung a great many. Three months ago I saw a bare chance of saving you for small contralto parts in some second-rate opera-house. But you have destroyed that chance. To-day you have nothing left. I bid you good evening."

CHAPTER NINE

FOR BETTER FOR WORSE, FOR RICHER FOR POORER

FOR three days Aglaia kept to her room.

At night her sleep was troubled by dismal dreams. She seemed to be wandering in the dark in a place like one of those infernal ravines depicted by Doré. A vague horror oppressed her, as she repeated: "There's no escape. It can never be undone. These walls are the barriers of fate." Then, from far overhead, she heard the harsh voice of Valentino Mughetto, and presently Mme. Linkow singing the rôle of *Gilda*. She woke with a start. Sunbeams entered between the shutters. They brightened the flowered paper of confusing designs; the chintz upholstery, covered with poppies, monkeys, pomegranates, butterflies; the piano that Mr. Goodchild had bought for her only three months ago. A groan escaped Aggie at realization that she had returned to the actual world.

Giannina, the maid, came in, tiptoe, with the breakfast-tray, her face arranged in mournful lines, her mouth no longer comic. Whispering hoarsely, she begged the signorina to drink just a little coffee; her husband, the buccaneer Federico, had made it with his own hands.

Mme. von Schwandorf brought into the room her yellow frizzes and melancholy, wise smile, her Florentine poodle, her overpowering odor of bergamot. Nodding, winking her faded eyes, she expressed in a tremulous voice the conviction that Aggie would some day enjoy looking back on these mournful moments. Mme. von Schwandorf supposed that Aggie's prostration was due to a lovers' quarrel.

For Aglaia had made the family swear that no one, not even Cyril Bellegram, should know the truth.

Her sisters and father were stunned by this calamity. With their pity was mingled now and then a little fear: the bolt that had shriveled those hopes might strike again, and annihilate still more. If Aggie's voice could fail—

All day they sat by her side, laid their cheeks against hers, tried to comfort her with caresses. All day, in other words, they kept fresh in her mind their compassion and her misfortune. Their love for her, no longer latent—indeed, too violently active—smothered her with its countless manifestations, irritated her, maddened her.

They wanted to read the latest novels aloud, take her walking in the park, or at least bathe her brow with cologne while she lay on her bed, her eyes fixed blankly on space. Aurelius, patting her hand, timidly ventured some maxims of Epictetus. Her nerves vibrated. She clenched her teeth and her fists, sent her father a strange, furtive look. His peculiarities had never seemed so distinct, so nearly unbearable.

O, to escape them all! To run far away and hide! To be for once alone!

They only increased their attentions.

Finally they persuaded Aggie to make excursions with them. They drove to the Tuscan hamlets the towers of which Boccaccio had known, to the hills like backgrounds by Leonardo da Vinci, to wayside inns, where, in smoky kitchens festooned with ropes of garlic, one ate a delicious lunch of eggs, coarse bread, and cheese. In the evening Aurelius suggested the Café Marco or made up a theater party.

Though November had come, the Alhambra, the open-air music-hall, had yet to close its doors. The Incomparable Nella Tesore, the "International Star," was playing an-

other engagement there. The Goodchilds, the three lieutenants, and Cyril Bellegram attended the show.

The Incomparable was preceded by a dozen minor artists; the proscenium, a golden square against the purple night, framed ballad-singers, acrobats, trained parrots, comedians, eccentric dancers. The audience drank beer, ate sherbets, puffed at cigars and cigarettes, and the veils of tobacco-smoke, rising slowly from the close-packed iron tables, mingled at last with the withering foliage overhead. But all diversions ceased, and great applause burst forth, as there stepped out upon the stage a dark, vivid woman with a figure full of curves and undulations, wearing a short, bespangled dress and the patent-leather hat of a bersagliere. With a gesture of good-fellowship, she gave the crowd a flashing smile. She began to sing in a loud, rather husky voice "The Romance of the Pretty Pansy-seller."

Camillo, aware that Frossie now understood Italian very well, engaged in earnest conversation. Cyril Bellegram, after listening suspiciously to the first verse, turned in a flurry to Aglaia.

"You're a little better now?"

Closing her eyes, she nodded, with an air of suffering.

"All that time you were so ill I felt like the very deuce. And even now, when I see those black shadows underneath your eyes —"

Nella Tesore, whose gestures, at least, remained misleading, attacked the last and most atrocious verse. Camillo talked faster. But Frossie,—the very Frossie who six months before would have shown a scarlet face in such a situation,—interrupted him with the words:

"Don't bother, Lieutenant. You must know that I can hear her all the same. What difference does it make? If you really believed that sort of thing might hurt me, you'd be paying me a poor compliment."

He stammered:

"Forgive me, Signorina! Yet my motive was like that of honest priests, who resent bad language where the image of their Virgin is enshrined."

Agitated by this speech, which was almost equal to a sentimental declaration, Frossie laughed quickly:

"Never mind, so long as poor dad adores it. It's easy to see he does n't understand one word in ten."

Mr. Goodchild sat well forward in his seat. With his high, white brow, his patriarchal beard of gold and silver, his sensitive features illumined by a pure delight, he afforded a spectacle to confound his ribald neighbors. When the Tesore had withdrawn, he proclaimed:

"Yes, siree, that lady is an artist! She has method, technic, a comic genius! She is wasted on so small a public. She would go far in the legitimate. I doubt if Réjane, whom I saw in Paris on my travels, began with such advantages."

Lieutenant Azeglio whispered solemnly to Lieutenant Fava:

"We ought to give him the benefit of her acquaintance!"

But Lieutenant Fava, leaning as close to Thallie as he dared, was relating, in an impassioned undertone, the longing of his lonely life — to be the cavalier of some one with "the brow of Piccarda Donati, the cheek of Catarina Sforza, the blush of Beatrice Portinari, the smile of La Fornarina." And Thallie was wondering, "Where is Reginald to-night? If only he were here, saying such words to me!"

Next evening, however, in the pension garden, she found Lieutenant Fava more explicit.

Strolling with him beside the garden-wall, of a sudden Thallie knew that he was making love to her. When a clump of bamboo concealed them from the rest, he stepped

in front of her to check her progress. His bony face, his rat-tail mustaches, his squint, all his extraordinary ugliness, appeared transfigured by the glowing purpose that incited him. He was going to propose!

Her heart in her throat, Thallie recoiled against the wall.

Lieutenant Fava clasped his hands before his chin, put on a piteous look, declaimed in hoarse tones:

"Mademoiselle, when you turn away your head like that my veins are filled with ice! Have pity on me! It's a month since I have slept! My very soul lies at your feet, your feet so tiny, so tormenting! I am mad with love for you! I love you with all my fibers! I am dying of it!"

Still Thallie stood motionless, her back against the wall, her pulses thumping. She felt that if this was not a dream, she was listening to a speech straight out of some romance.

The Sicilian snatched her hand, pressed it against the padded bosom of his cavalry jacket. He did this very well, as though he had practised it considerably.

"Marry me, and we will go away to my own land, where the roses never fade, where the winds are like kisses, where the sunsets bring tears, where the moonlight will make you tremble. All our life shall be one long embrace, a golden cup of bliss, never emptied!"

That was a line that he had heard a Roman actor speak in a play called "The Whirlwind of Passion." But the actor's delivery was no better than Lieutenant Fava's.

This amorous homage, so poetically suggestive, all for her, filled Thallie's heart with a delicious tremor. Closing her eyes, she tried to imagine those impassioned cadences as issuing from another's lips. But the other was far away in Paris, and the Sicilian was close beside her, holding her hand in his, from which flowed into her tissues, like a magnetic current, the full strength of his desire. She saw a mirage of all her girlhood dreams—the eternal land

where the roses never fade, where the winds are like kisses, where life is a long embrace. For the moment the one who proffered those delights was transformed by the fact that he adored her. Slightly dizzy, with parted lips, she even visualized the fulfilment of his vows.

But shame and remorse came to her. She wrenched her hand free. She perceived him again as he actually was, a dreadfully homely young man, an unspeakably impudent young man, would-be profaner of all that she was holding sacred for the other. She transfixed him with a look, and, summoning all the majesty that twenty can display, pronounced:

"I'm very sorry, Lieutenant, but it can never be."

"Ah, the American, no doubt," he exclaimed, with a hideous mechanical smile.

Lifting her chin, she turned away.

Behind her back, he made the gesture that accompanies a Sicilian imprecation. Then, following her, contritely:

"Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle! At least, let me still be a friend of yours?"

"If you wish," she responded coldly, amazed at her self-possession, her feeling of superiority.

All the rest of the evening she kept thinking, "A man has proposed to me, and I've turned him down!" She felt much older than before that episode—in fact, quite the woman of the world.

At last Thalia had the exultation of a girl who knows that she is desired. When she looked in the mirror, her familiar person seemed remarkable, because of the disturbance it had caused. She had entered her kingdom of romance, was living such a life as she had begrudged the heroines of summer novels. And, to luxuriate more fully in the hour, she tried to imitate the mien, the thoughts, the whole conquering sweetness of that charming myth, the super-girl of fiction,

whose face was on every book-cover, whose tyrannical witchery filled a thousand reams of print, whose idealized existence could hardly be imagined as descending to a compromise with nature.

But it was difficult to hold that pose for long.

To be sure, November was in, yet Italy had not lost its sensuous spell. The freshened winds brought stronger fragrances from the indomitable gardens. The hills that formed the cup of Florence still showed the same hues on their voluptuous contours. The night silences were interrupted still by love-songs full of unexpected, melting cadences, a-throb with the hot virility of the South. And through the winding streets, round the old palaces, in the recesses of the museums, a chance thought renewed the vibration of ancient passions, historic and mythological, that had been violent more often than serene, erotic more frequently than spiritual. As the sensitive heart becomes, in love, a lodestone, attaching to itself all influences in sympathy with its condition, Thallie, drinking in greedily whatever Florence could furnish to illuminate these new emotions, was no longer able to maintain the attitude of the super-girl of fiction.

In Via de' Bardi, too, her state of mind induced enlightenment. While the model rested, M. Zolande told more anecdotes about the love-affairs of famous artists who had been his fellow-students. The Parisian was not so careful now to trim his tales. But the change in their tone had been so gradual that Thallie scarcely noticed any difference.

Somehow she had to admire those painters who were never bothered by convention, who had all their improprieties condoned because of their renown. It appeared that the artistic temperament excused one from a lot of moral obligations. This was a startling thought for Thallie, who felt sure that she had the artistic temperament herself.

"Still," she ventured, "a great artist surely doesn't have to be immoral!"

M. Zolande gave this remark the attention it deserved. In the end, spreading out his hands:

"But what is immorality? What is called immoral to-day was called moral yesterday, may be moral to-morrow. Morality is a whim of the moment: but humanity extends through all the ages. And, being so to speak an eternal individual, man should judge for himself. It is only those who judge for themselves that are fit to rise above the herd, that are stamped with genius."

While this rigmarole impressed her, Thallie had a feeling that in such an argument there really ought to be a weak point. She knew well what her father would say to such opinions! And she suspected that John Holland, if he had heard that speech, would advise her all the more earnestly to find another painting-teacher.

But from the eminence of twenty summers she decided, "They would n't understand as I do. For they belong,—yes, both of them,—to the old order, the conservative Anglo-Saxon world, that produced in esthetics only the monstrosities of the Victorian period!"

And for the moment she was impatient with natures too strict to comprehend M. Zolande's ideas, which were "formed of those instincts, groping toward freedom, that produced masterpieces."

She believed that her hours in Via de' Bardi had greatly broadened her in many ways. She came to regard Alphonse Zolande as a fascinating old thing, replete with the philosophy of the artistic life. Now and then, naively playing at the famous comradeship of studios, she made his noon-day coffee.

Her rich auburn ringlets tumbling round her ears, she bent her spring-like face above the spirit-lamp. In her

sky-blue eyes solicitude for the coffee mingled with relish of this lark. She made him sit at table, the cracked cup before him, a towel tucked under his chin. Half grave, half dimpling, her fine skin flushed delicately by the flame, she approached him with the brimming coffee-pot, and her bated breath gently swelled the bosom of her gingham apron. The lean, corded hand of that "fatherly old thing," that Methuselah of fifty, shook as it raised the cup — from senility, no doubt! But Thallie, with a far-away look, was thinking, "Some day, in a different sort of place, I shall make Reginald's coffee."

She disclosed such hopes to Frossie, of afternoons, when she walked with her sister through the Florence streets. And the two girls forgot the passers-by, the parti-colored church-fronts, the towers and domes that shone like a medieval vision through the mist of sunset, while revealing to each other their most intimate desire, a husband who should always be a lover.

One afternoon, in the Piazza Beccaria, they saw the pedestrians all staring to the north, children running, cabs drawing toward the curb. A muffled clatter swelled gradually to a noise like summer thunder, and down the broad Viale, in a thick fog of dust, came trotting the Cavalry of Magenta, back from the country.

Above a flood of field-uniforms bristled five hundred lances. The roll of hoofs shook the ground; the rattle of sabers and carbines became one deafening clash. The colonel and his trumpeter pounded by; the first platoon passed, the second, the third, a squadron of dirty riders and lathered mounts, a glitter of steel, a flapping of pennons, an odor of horses, wet leather, and sweating men. The second squadron approached, like some awesome machine on innumerable slim legs. And the first platoon of this squadron was led by Camillo, belted and booted, in dingy olive-gray.

His face was the color of earth; his mustaches seemed blond; his eyes, inflamed by the dust, stared straight ahead. He looked strong, masculine, hard, far beyond all thoughts of love. And Frossie felt once more that fear of his calling, that apprehension which dimmed her pride as a cloud obscures the sun.

When the fifth and last squadron had racketed by, the sisters slowly turned homeward, sneezing in unison.

"It seems to me your beau might at least have slipped us a nod!"

"He was on duty, Thallie."

"Lieutenant Fava managed to recognize us."

"Where was he?"

"Oh, you could never have seen him!" But suddenly Thallie stopped short, gave Frossie a nudge, and cried, "Well, look who's here!"

A cab passed, bearing Aggie, Cyril Bellegram, and Bristles.

"My dear, that's beginning to happen nearly every day!" And so it was.

Aglaia's melancholy had bewildered Cyril. With a sort of fright he had watched that strange enfeeblement of her resolution, on which he was now accustomed to depend. But finally, since she no longer practised singing, since she could not bear even to discuss her music, he concluded that she was merely suffering from overwork. He got her to drive with him into the countryside.

They visited Certosa, Grassina, Careggi, Pratolino, the monasteries, the decayed fortresses, the famous villas. They invaded the stronghold of the Alessandri, the rural convent where Fra Bartolommeo had lived, the tower, rising from beds of ivy and vervain, where Galileo had watched the moon.

There, high above a labyrinth of roadside walls, they saw

the distant Arno send forth its yellow flashes, the sheen of the city break through the olive groves, the whole brilliant panorama expand to the Carrara mountains. And the silence was interrupted only by the doves, whose notes were like the low, inarticulate murmurings of lovers.

She leaned against the parapet, pale, slender, graceful even in distress. Attired in soft yellow, wearing a broad, be-ribboned hat of native straw, she resembled the princess of a modish fantasy, staring out from her battlements across a lost domain. Now especially her face absorbed the sunlight as if more ethereal than flesh. Her lustrous hair, in these keen rays, seemed to share the pallor of her skin. Her green eyes, in the shadow of her hat-brim as unfathomable as the sea, slowly followed a road that wound away toward the west, where a yoke of white bullocks drew something that glimmered like a vanishing treasure.

All empty the treasury of hope! All gone the courage that was to buy a splendid life! The mirage of fame, which had been all these years so vivid, grew thin against the zenith and was absorbed into the sun forever. Aglaia, as cold as though her very heart's blood had been drawn forth into space, turned toward the future that she would have to meet, that seemed to her empty of the least congenial promise, like the destiny of an unlucky stranger.

And because her voice had failed, she now doubted the power of her charms. She no longer felt sure that a determined woman could dominate any man. She recalled her longing to conquer some day one who was strong among his fellows, holding himself aloof in his renown and wealth. She might never glimpse the regions that such men inhabited!

The white bullocks and their glimmering treasure had melted into the west.

She saw Cyril staring at her dreamily. For the moment

she had forgotten Cyril, who might become the secretary of an embassy, whose wife would then be at liberty to make her bow before a throne.

"How restful it is with you!" she sighed. "You don't torment me with a lot of condolences! Come, let's go on. Let's go so far to-day that even sadness falls behind."

The carriage rolled on between mellow walls overhung with ilex-trees. Aglaia reclined against the cushions in a pose that emphasized her exquisite fragility. Cyril, with busy eyes, adored this marvel whose physical softness and mental potency both seemed necessary to his nature.

He had an illusion of setting forth, at last, on the ideal elopement: for the ideal sat beside him, in every trait different from the girls at home. Again he compared those girls of Devonshire with her — their weather-beaten cheeks with her exotic complexion, their vigor with her poetic languor, their brusqueness with her wise subtlety. Yes, it was certainly she whom he had meant to find, on those nights when he had thrown off convention with a desperate gesture!

But that very rareness of hers disheartened him. In Aglaia he seemed to discern the estranging promises of a unique career. While he was still doing the routine-work of embassies, she would doubtless have become the greatest singer in the world. It no longer occurred to him that prima donnas, while very well in their own way, were hardly the sort that English country gentlemen should marry. He only thought, "How insignificant I must appear to her when she contemplates that future — the frantic cities, the bouquets of kings, the foreign titles laid before her feet!" He tortured himself with the picture of some burly, bearded foreign prince, some Russian or Austrian grand duke, gathering her at last into his arms — a morganatic bride!

And of course such graces had already troubled many

hearts. In her own land what men had loved her? And did they still mourn her absence? And did she remember all their vows with tenderness, with a divine compunction?

Cyril suggested in a bitter tone:

"Perhaps this sadness that you want to leave behind has its origin across the sea? Perhaps you'll not get rid of it till you've returned to some one in America?"

"Don't be silly," she retorted. "I'm not thinking of America."

Still, thoughts of rivalry — the more insidious because infected with the pathos of great distances — impelled him to add:

"Some letter may have depressed you, without your knowing it. Love sometimes grows in the heart without our knowledge."

"You seem mighty familiar with such things. I suppose you have reason to be."

"Not at all."

But his voice revealed the fact that he wanted her to doubt the truth of his denial. For though women like to pretend that the present lover is the first, men find a secret satisfaction in implying that they have had some previous experience.

Aggie was not deceived by him in any way. Nevertheless, she said:

"Do you remember the evening when I read your palm? That tell-tale heart-line! Just one affair after the other! From one flower to the next, without a thought of those you've left behind!"

Regaining his sincerity, he protested:

"I swear to you that my greatest happiness would be to love just one forever."

"Some young foreign thing, some little princess that you'll meet in the diplomatic world?" And, as he began

to tremble and to stutter, "Look, Cyril, the sun is setting—like a painting by Turner. It's chilly already. We must hurry back."

"We must always hurry back," he muttered.

They regained Florence in the dusk.

But one day they visited Fiesole.

They had drunk their tea on the empty hotel terrace, overlooking the valley of the Arno. In the air, despite the sunshine, on the hillsides, for all the fullness of perennial foliage, there was a threat of change, a hint that many spells which had enhanced this intercourse were weakening. He, pulling hard at his pipe, reluctantly observed the alteration of the world; she, watching him across the table, spoke of it.

"Even autumn is nearly over. Nature reminds us that it's time for you to make your start, prepare for your career."

His eyes flickered nervously. His narrow face, that face of a neurotic younger brother of Julius Cæsar, grew longer and longer, beneath the dangling black forelock. Sinking into his rumpled Norfolk jacket, he appeared as sad a young man as ever contemplated great achievements.

In the hotel some one began to play the "Vissi d'arte" from "Tosca," the air so poignantly associated with Aglaia's failure. She was unable to repress a gasp of pain.

"What's the matter?"

Pressing her handkerchief to her lips, she lowered her head.

"That piano?"

Gradually her form grew tense, as if her whole being was pervaded with a final resolution. And slowly, so that the change in her might be complete, she raised a face that he had never seen before, with tremulous lips, with misty eyes, with a blush like the transfiguration of a lily in the

sunset. Her voice, recalling the doves round Galileo's tower, answered:

"The 'Vissi d'arte,' that you were playing in the pension the day we met."

With fallen jaws, he uttered:

"Aglaia!"

"Then you do care for me?"

"Oh, Aggie!"

"You never actually spoke. I had to conclude you did n't really want me."

"Not want you!"

"At any rate," she faltered, as her lashes veiled her eyes, "now you know the cause of all my sadness."

He sat there a-tremble, trying to realize that this divinity was going to condescend to his embrace.

"You, with your wonderful future!"

"No," she breathed, with a gesture of sublime renunciation, "I shall give up my career in opera now. I shall devote myself wholly to your interests."

And there, high above the city that had been for him the birthplace, and for her the sepulcher, of fine ambitions, they gazed toward a far horizon, which neither could hope to reach without the other.

While driving back to Florence, they decided to be married that week, and leave at once for England.

A superb dawn ushered in the wedding-day.

The American church in the Piazza del Carmine resounded with the march from "Lohengrin." Before the flower-strewn altar the minister began to read the service:

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony."

All that little world stood there motionless — the three

lieutenants, whose dress uniforms blazed in the sunshine of high noon; Mme. von Schwandorf, whose bergamot suppressed the perfume of the roses; even M. Zolande, in hired evening dress, which gave him the look of a middle-aged rake betrayed by a sunrise. Thallie and Frossie, who resembled two Watteau damsels in dresses just alike, held their bunches of roses rigidly before them. Their faces, pale with solemnity, kept sinking forward, as if they themselves felt that trepidation which is supposed to be the bride's. But when the minister asked, "Who giveth this woman?" all eyes turned to Mr. Goodchild.

Aurelius felt the pathos of his rôle. Now there came back to him the picture of a baby peeping across her supper-plate in Zenasville. He saw her, too, in maidenhood, when it would have seemed like sacrilege to think that some day a stranger might possess her budding comeliness. But now he was surrendering her to the stranger; and presently her sisters would travel the same road, and he would be left alone.

"Who giveth this woman?"

What emotions did Aurelius not long to show in his response! Resignation to life, the stoicism of an Epictetus: for Aggie a swift epitome of his paternal love; for Cyril a magnanimous assurance of his trust. And oh, to express at the same time the keenest pang of all—that the one whom he had lost full twenty years before was not beside him at such a moment in the flesh! Raising his head, he strove to put all those thoughts into the dramatic line that fate had given him. But his face, with its tangled, grizzled beard, its transparent temples, its aquiline features sharpened still more by grief, only twitched spasmodically, like the visage of a saint enduring martyrdom. A hoarse rattle issued from his throat. For the first time in his life Aurelius missed a cue.

Gently the minister appropriated Aggie's hand and placed it in the bridegroom's.

"I, Aglaia, take thee, Cyril, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer —"

Her voice had the timbre of a silver bell. Her eyes shone steadfast, greener than ever beneath the veil of tulle, that had suggested to her the veil in which the wives of diplomatists made their bows before a throne.

"Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder."

It was done.

A wedding-breakfast awaited them at the pension.

The table in the red dining-room was heaped with the remaining flowers of the garden. The centerpiece was a frosted cake, two feet high, surmounted by a cupola in which appeared a little sugar bride and bridegroom clasping hands.

On the sideboard the wedding-presents were displayed.

Mr. Goodchild had given a gold necklace in Etruscan style, and assurance that Aggie should receive one-third of the Outwall legacy. Frossie and Thallie had bought a silver tea-set covered with cherubs. Camillo furnished a table-cloth of Florentine embroidery, Fava an urn made of lava from Mount Etna, Azeglio half a dozen silver tooth-picks. Mme. von Schwandorf's gift was a mammoth pin-cushion, frilled with lace, and painted with two hearts skewered by the dart of Cupid. As for M. Zolande, he proffered an oil-sketch made in other days — of lions devouring some Christian maidens. Nothing had yet arrived from Reginald, Mme. Linkow, or John Holland.

At last the company was seated round the board. For the moment silence reigned, produced by a general embarrassment.

But a sound of excited whispering entered from the hall, where the patrons of the pension were gathered. At the end of the dining-room, behind piled-up tables, the house-servants craned their necks to see the bride. Giannina, the maid, uttered cries of admiration; Domenico, the door-porter, had smuggled in his wife and children; for a time there showed among those eager faces the cook's cap, the touseled heads of scullions.

Federico and his assistants, wearing white cotton gloves, majestically served the wedding-party.

With Mme. von Schwandorf, they were ten. Aurelius could not imagine why M. Farazounis had not come. He missed Dr. Numble and the Inchkins, far away in Zenasville. His conscience smote him because he had not insisted on inviting all the people in the hall.

At least they should view the presents!

The menu offered caviar, double bouillon, a mayonnaise of sole, chickens in aspic, a crayfish salad, ices. The glasses, at Aggie's instigation, brimmed with champagne: all waited for Mr. Goodchild to propose, "The bride!" But Aurelius seemed inclined to wait until the feast was over. The young men philosophically began to drink their wine.

The Cavalry of Magenta soon displayed its gallantry. Lieutenant Fava broke the ice:

"Happy the sun that kisses such a bride!"

"These roses are not so fair," averred Azeglio, debonair even in defeat.

The three soldiers declared that the bridegroom must wear a talisman. They wanted to know if he had sold himself to the devil in exchange for so much bliss. They bombarded him with complimentary jests in French, broken English, and Italian. Their high spirits soon conquered every one but Cyril.

The bridegroom was in a nightmare. He had not imagined that marriage meant this horrible publicity and levity. He felt like a man who enters a long-sought sanctuary, to find buffoons cavorting round the altar. Still, he managed to mask these sensations with a ghastly grin. To the rest he seemed merely to display the nuptial embarrassment that was wanting in the bride.

But even Aggie's smile grew strained when Aurelius stood up.

The father swept the table with a humid glance. His voice vibrated as he began:

"Friends, we are here to celebrate a sacrament, to wish the high contracting parties happiness. But of that blessing they already seem assured by the celestial auguries; Aglaia was born with the planet Venus in the sign of Aries, Cyril with Venus in the sympathetic sign of Sagittarius. From far countries Providence brought these two beautifully congenial natures into propinquity. Each may say, with the ancient poet:

"The wind from Ilium to Cicon's shore
Hath driven me!

"And surely, even without our prayers, God will bring to a glorious consummation this mystery of His handiwork. Yes, let them bear away to Albion our perfect confidence rather than our hopes: for just the touching sincerity of their betrothal must have won our Lord's benevolence. Each will find in the other that complement necessary to the highest unions, which Emerson has described. Each may say henceforth, in the immortal lines of Bayard Taylor,

"I love thee, I love but thee,
With a love that shall not die
Till the sun grows cold,

And the stars are old,
And the leaves of the judgment book unfold!"

At this finale, Aggie bit her lip, and Cyril fairly cringed. But the company, rising, brandished their champagne-glasses.

"*Hoch!*" cried Mme. von Schwandorf, beside herself with emotion, "*Hoch, hoch, das Hochzeitspaar!*"

"*Evviva!*" shouted Fava and Azeglio, in the tones they used when the trumpets sounded the charge above a roar of hoof-beats.

Camillo, crushing Cyril's hand in his, exclaimed earnestly:

"Long life, Signore! Good luck! Many babies!"

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Bristles began to yelp; handclapping rattled in the hall; at the far end of the dining-room napkins and aprons fluttered; the porter's youngest child fell off the barricade of tables. The bride escaped to don her traveling dress.

In front of the pension a crowd had gathered round the waiting carriage: when the bridal pair appeared, a lot of Rabelaisian loafers doffed their hats. And suddenly all the cripples in Florence seemed to rise from nowhere and beset the bridegroom.

With a frenzied gesture, he hurled a pocketful of silver upon the pavement. The coins, the crutches, the beggars, with their bandaged feet and slings, all struck the ground at once.

Aggie was in her father's arms; her sisters clung weeping to her cloak. There fell a shower of rice, and Cyril discovered on his cane a brave white-ribbon bow.

No longer rational, moved as if by a madman's strength, he thrust his wife into the carriage. "Drive like the devil," he screamed as a slipper whizzed past his ear. With a jerk the vehicle started; Cyril lost his hat. "Never mind! Go on, I say!" The coachman cracked his whip, the car-

riage careened, the horse turned the corner like a doubling hare.

But still Mr. Goodchild, Frossie, and Thallie stood staring down the street. They could hardly believe that Aggie was not coming back to them by dinner-time. They could not yet realize that the Graces were no longer three.

CHAPTER TEN

A JUST MAN JUDGES NOT ONLY THE OFFENDER,
BUT HIMSELF

AGGIE mailed from Milan a post-card of the cathedral: the weather there was fine, she was leaving for Paris on the morrow, she sent her love to all. From Paris, writing on a print of Jeanne d'Arc's statue, she announced that it was raw and rainy, that she had forwarded some fashion-plates, was off for England, sent her love to all. And from London, scrawled across a picture of Westminster Abbey: "Nothing but rain! Tell dad to take his ammoniated quinine at the first sign of snuffles. Going down to Devonshire. Love to all."

Thallie and Frossie had dared to hope for pages of enlightenment. They stared at these paltry missives with the look of children in whose faces a door has been slammed shut. But they showed no chagrin in their replies, wherein appeared, indeed, a hint of new respect, as it were of two neophytes for a full-fledged priestess.

They informed Aglaia that more wedding-gifts had come — from Reginald Dux, in Paris, a punch-bowl of carved rock crystal; from Mme. Linkow, who was on the high seas now, a signed photograph in a frame of Russian enamel; from John Holland, in Rome, twelve Chinese plates adorned with shrimp-colored and pale-green dragons. Aggie, answering with a line from Devonshire, instructed the family to keep those presents safe. She sent her love to all.

In each of her notes Mr. Goodchild fancied he could trace the brusqueness that is caused by pain. "She's still homesick in spite of Cyril, and afraid that she'll distress us all the more by showing it. She, too, is learning that the habit of a lifetime is n't broken in a day."

For Aurelius did not bear that loss as easily as did Aggie's sisters. He perceived the fact so saddening to parents, that with marriage the beloved child becomes not only another's, but another. He felt that he was no longer first in her affections.

Mme. von Schwandorf tried to raise his spirits.

"What you need, Mr. Goodchild, is distractions. I don't say you're too old to fall in love yourself, but you are a friend of mine, so no fear that I shall recommend it! Hm! How about the famous poem? Can't you make something extra horrible befall *Fiammetta* and *Rodolfo*?"

Aurelius fetched a sigh.

"My Muse seems to have deserted me of late."

"A different line? A fling at the drama? Soon we shall need a play ourselves in the Pension Schwandorf. You know, we have always entertainments in the winter months — little dances, tableaux, theatricals. Yes, the gaieties shall start just so soon as the guests begin to come again in earnest, perhaps right after Christmas."

Christmas! It was true; in three weeks they would celebrate that festival. And Aurelius wondered dolefully if this Christmas day was to be his last with Frossie and Thalia.

For now, even to a father so inadvertent, there seemed no doubt of Camillo Olivuzzi's purpose. And Mr. Goodchild had just brought to Thallie a letter directed in a masculine hand and postmarked "Paris."

How Thallie hugged that letter to her breast while escaping to her room! Her first glance, flashing down the page,

absorbed the whole tenor of Reginald's communication. But one part stood forth as if written in more vivid ink:

The doctors say that little Rosalie, Hector Ghillamoor's daughter, must have a better climate as soon as we can move her. I'm boosting Florence like a real-estate promoter.

She closed her eyes in delight. This proved that he could not stay away for long, that he was planning to be with her even while beside the black-haired woman of the Cherbourg tender. Let Mrs. Ghillamoor bring her poor sick child to Florence if she wished. Thallie began, indeed, to sympathize with Mrs. Ghillamoor in her trouble. She wondered if the hotel that they selected could provide the proper food for little invalids. Would it be too forward to put up some glasses of fruit-jelly, and send them to the mother with her compliments?

Her quickened hopes made Thallie more radiant than ever. In the street she wore a look that caused the responsive Florentines to shake their heads indulgently. Cold winds might come blowing down across the hills, but there, along the Arno, *La Primavera*—all nature's flowering loveliness personified—went smiling toward the consummation of her dreams. And the thoughts that made her face so bright grew more thrilling as they reached forth to the unknown. She was seized no longer with timidity when her conjectures passed the boundaries of experience. She was all eager now, with *La Primavera's* own divine simplicity, for the complete development of her romance. Each fervid secret that Florence had whispered in her ear, each insidious influence that had extended her anticipations, finally combined with her innate propensities to make this waiting almost dolorous.

She took it for granted that Frossie had similar emotions.

Every fine afternoon, till time for the Magenta Cavalry to call, the two sisters walked together through the town. More closely linked than ever by the harmony of their desires, they reached a new degree of frankness in their speculations. These talks were so engrossing that they often halted, looked round them in amazement, laughed outright, to find themselves lost in some beggarly piazza of the suburbs. But toward four o'clock they usually managed to drop in at Giacinta's tea-room.

They liked that place, with its bright furnishings and pastry-laden counters, its odors of hot chocolate and modish perfumes, its babble, in half a dozen languages, pervaded with the tones of violins. It pleased them, while dawdling over tea and toasted muffins, to watch the people clustered round the tables.

They were most interested in the fashionable Florentines — the lithe, subtle-looking countesses, the young nobles with glossy heads and the faces of d'Annunzio's heroes, the old princes, spick and span, shriveled up as if half consumed by many hectic years, who gazed round them with a look in which was blended a weary cynicism and an unquenchable curiosity. Once more, as in New York and Paris, the sisters wondered what the lives of such people might be like.

Since titles at once suggested glitter and profusion, they imagined state apartments lighted and festooned for some great ball, extending to sumptuous vistas such as they had seen in palaces open to the public at a franc a head. In that sort of setting — all tapestries and antique statues and great crystal chandeliers — they saw these countesses, these heroes from d'Annunzio's books, revolving to the strains of an exceptionally languid tango, the clinging forms endlessly reflected from great mirrors framed in golden scrolls.

And they conjured up scenes, in alcoves full of azaleas and ferns, like fragments from those French novels that one

bought at Schreiber's book-shop and kept in the bureau-drawer beneath the lingerie—a billet-doux passed in a bouquet of camellias, a whisper that set the blossoms round about to quivering, a kiss which should never have been taken or surrendered, so soft that it was lost in the faint throbbing of the music.

To be sure, both Thallie and Frossie would have been horrified at thought of acting in such scenes themselves. Yet the abstract idea, of rose-scented intrigue, or laxities mitigated somehow by the wealth and cultivation that pervaded them, impressed the sisters half against their will, just as a gorgeous, deadly flower might have fascinated them.

But who would ever show them the true complexion of those regions, always so close at hand yet always so well hidden?

One day they observed a new-comer in Giacinta's tea-room, a mountainous, middle-aged woman with a parrot's beak and several sprouting moles. The stranger's jowls, like those of some outlandish goddess devoted to obesity, were covered thick with bluish powder. Her black-dyed curls were arranged elaborately underneath a Paris hat no bigger than a soup-plate. The purple satin that swathed her elephantine shape was coquettish to the ruffles. Sitting as high among her friends as if a hassock had been added to her chair, this apparition kept tossing little sugared cakes into her maw, and draining her tea-cup at a gulp. But suddenly she exclaimed in French, in a voice that penetrated the chatter like the bray of a bassoon:

"Oh, no, the earth-bound spirits can see us quite distinctly! That's why one finds round wine-shops so many ghosts of drunkards, trying to inhale the fumes of alcohol, and lick up with their spectral tongues the puddles on the tables."

With a snort, Thallie swallowed a mouthful of tea the wrong way.

"Fee-fi-fo-fum!" she gasped. "If Moloch ever had a wife, there she sits now!"

"That line about the spectral tongues!" chuckled Frossie. "How I wish I knew her! I'll bet I could use every word she drops."

"What, in a novel of medieval Florence?"

Frossie's face fell.

"You're right. Darn it! That's the trouble, not sticking to modern times. I have to pass so much by."

She forgot her tea, neglected even to listen to the bray of "Moloch's wife," while considering the tribulations that afflict the author.

Yet Frossie had already managed to collect considerable data for the medieval novel from her own experience.

Her desire to write convincing fiction was no less intense than her desire to be loved. The intermingling of the two impulses had this result: sooner or later all Frossie's love-affair was reduced to copy.

Often, for fear she might forget some precious incident, this virginal George Sand made notes the moment Camillo had departed. In her room, flung down at her writing-table, her breast still throbbing from its proximity to him, she scribbled feverishly the substance of their afternoon — his phrases and her sensations on hearing them, his glances of self-revelation and her responses, all the tender tones, even the meaning silences, that seemed to her invaluable stuff because distilled from truth itself. In short, her developing artistic sense, with all the ruthlessness that the artistic sense has visited on greater natures, commanded Frossie to portray in black and white each palpitation of her heart and of her lover's, just as, in the future, it would command

her, still more imperiously indeed, to spread on the printed page each joy and grief that fate assigned to her.

She loved Camillo none the less because she utilized him so.

Although there was no actual engagement yet, those two had drifted into a tacit understanding. When Camillo described his parents, Frossie saw them greeting her with open arms in the courtyard of the old Abruzzi hill castle; and when she revealed to him her love of domesticity, he told her how cheaply a young married couple could live in garrison towns.

"And then," he explained, with that primitive simplicity at which even Frossie never blushed, "there's always one's orderly, to save the hire of a nurse-maid."

Nowadays his natural austerity was strengthened, his ambition stimulated. In barracks, when his brother-officers planned some rakish party, he turned the key in the lock, sat down to his reading-lamp and books. They pounded with their sword-hilts on the door, blew smoke through the key-hole, shouted at him:

"Come out, old priest! Toto Fava has won two hundred lire at the club, and Azeglio has a money-order from his mama!"

"Then be off with you, before it burns holes in their pockets."

"But look here, we're all going to Bianca's!"

"Tell Bianca she's so beautiful these days that I'm afraid of her."

"What a disgrace he is to a brave regiment of lancers! Camillo, I'm going to get my uncle to put you in the Papal Guard! Meanwhile, shall we send for the chaplain to sit and hold your hand?"

With a final volley of chaff, already breaking into song, they jingled away to their frolic. Camillo, laughing softly,

resumed the study of Cadorna's "Rules Concerning the Management of Large Field Units."

On exercise-marches, when he led his platoon of forty men along the roads afoot, the clash of accouterments, the broad faces streaked with sweat, the familiar smell of coarse dye from the troopers' uniforms, renewed in Camillo the resolve to reach the top in that profession. And when he went out, immaculately brushed and polished, to call on Frossie, he paused in the barrack-gateway beside the full-length mirror, to stare at the photographs of the royal family framed against the wall. Setting his jaws, Camillo muttered, "Some day your Majesties shall receive her in the Quirinal Palace as the wife of your chief of staff!"

He bought a big map of Austria. At night, long after the trumpets had blown the *silenzio*, he bent over his table with a ruler and a nickle-plated watch, moving white pins, which represented Italian army corps, against black pins, the army corps of Emperor Francis Joseph. He always arranged the enemy's forces as carefully as he did his own. It was fair for him to know their disposition; in actual war his aëroplanes would have discovered that.

Aërial scouting interested him; a future chief of staff ought surely to be familiar with this arm. One afternoon, with Azeglio and Fava, Camillo rode out toward Quarto to meet a man who could boast two biplanes of his own.

This was Baron di Campoformio, whom Reginald and Hector Ghillamoor had visited.

The baron, a thin-haired, weather-beaten, youngish gentleman in tweeds, called for a saddle-horse and led the way down the hillside to his flying-field. At the end of a level pasture stood the hangars, behind the open doors of which one saw the two machines, like monstrous insects crouching in their lairs. Some mechanics pushed out a Maurice Far-

man biplane. Campoformio explained the principles of flight.

To ignite the Renault stationary engine, one twirled the propeller placed behind the fuselage. As the mechanics dodged away, the biplane would travel forward on its pneumatic wheels. At the blast from the propeller the tail would clear the turf, the machine while gathering speed would come up on tip-toe, the whole fabric would gently leave the ground and climb the air.

The Baron proceeded to describe the theory of navigation. Clambering into the fuselage, he handled the throttle and controls, raised the elevator, moved the ailerons, pressed on the pedals to deflect the rudder. Around him, the three lieutenants, perched on the tubing of the frame regardless of their natty uniforms, peered at the mechanism with contracted brows, then turned their eyes toward the heavens.

Camillo wanted to be taken up. Campoformio, glancing at the swift December clouds, replied:

"Let's wait till there are not so many flurries. The first fine day I'll prove to you why this machine is better than the ones we're using in the army."

Fava sprang down to the ground with a grimace.

"What a pity! I wanted to sail to Florence, to the garden of the Pension Schwandorf, and carry away a certain little devil with the curls of a Venetian of Venice."

For the baron's benefit, Azeglio explained:

"A red-headed American girl has had the cheek to refuse our handsome Toto. He's heartbroken, not really on account of the Venetian curls, but because he thinks she's rich. Well, I went after the eldest, not bad at all — and she asked me to her wedding. Camillo's the only lucky one, unless I have Fava's permission, now, to try his Thallie?"

"Not yet," declared Fava. "I may be cut up, but at least I'm good for one more charge."

"Just a moment," said Campoformio, laughing. "Have any of you counted the money?"

"Papa dresses himself so badly that he must be at least a millionaire."

Camillo, with a shrug of distaste, passed his sinewy brown hand along the propeller-blades of walnut-wood.

"By the way," drawled Azeglio, "we did n't introduce papa to the International Star!"

Camillo gave the Renault engine a final pat, as he would have caressed a horse that he desired to ride. He remarked quietly:

"See that you don't, you precious team of donkeys."

"Aha!" exclaimed Fava, with a wink, "the Tesore might run through the family fortune, I suppose."

Azeglio assented, grinning:

"Very likely. He was interested enough that night at the Alhambra."

"Simpletons!" Camillo retorted hotly, "that honest old man saw only the performer. By this time, what with all that gallops through his brain, he's forgotten her completely. Take care that you leave it so!"

But at that very moment, in the Café Hirsch, Aurelius was examining respectfully a newspaper picture of the International Star.

The bald-headed, fat little waiter came drooping to the table.

"Black coffee, Otto, if you please," said Aurelius, absent-mindedly.

"Black coffee," moaned Otto, and dragged his feet across the floor to the buffet.

"Tell me, Otto, did you ever see this lady in the paper?"

The German-Swiss responded in a hollow voice:

"Mr. Gootschild, if I had the money for theaters and so on, I would not be waiting already in this kind of *Kaffeehaus*."

"I thought perhaps a celebrity like that —"

"A celebrity, Mr. Gootschild! Yes, that is how fame is easy for some peoples! Believe me, it is not talents that wins in this world; it is the charlotte-russes of humanity! *Und* I, who would know how to satisfy titles in a hotel de luxe, must stand here *und* see the celebrity of such a *Frauenzimmer*!"

"Stop there!" Aurelius cried, and drew himself up with flashing eyes. "Neither you nor I know anything derogatory to that lady!"

"*Ach*, Mr. Gootschild, don't fool yourself. Those stage artists they are all alike."

"I deny your right to say so. I deny your right to malign an honorable profession, with which, I may inform you, I myself have been affiliated. You are speaking from envious rumor, sir, from malicious hearsay, from ignorance. I must say to you, in the words of Leonardo da Vinci, 'You do ill if you praise, but worse if you censure, what you do not understand.'" Red patches were painted on Aurelius's cheek-bones. His nostrils expanded and turned white. His hands were trembling. Then suddenly relaxing all over, he uttered, with a tremulous smile, "Excuse me, my friend, but I can't sit silent while any one offends a lady and the stage."

Otto passed his service-napkin across his brow with a distracted gesture.

"*Gott* forgive me, Mr. Gootschild; but if only you had said in the first place that the lady was a friend of yours!"

"She is not, Otto. She is not, I regret to say. I should

have been proud indeed to meet her, to touch hands with so much skill. Besides, it would have given me a chance to offer a suggestion."

Aurelius fell into a reverie. That meeting,—the extraordinary sort of meeting that imaginative natures like to fancy,—might have occurred in the Alhambra green-room, which he saw as a sort of salon full of interesting souvenirs. There, in the atmosphere he loved, he might have enjoyed the stimulation of a few words with a genuine comic genius. Bowing, expressing his obligation to the person who presented him, he would have told the vaudeville actress that she ought to rival Réjane in the legitimate. Finally, he would have offered the opinion that America, with its keen sense of humor, could best appreciate her.

Aloud he concluded, thoughtfully:

"Yes, she would go far if the opportunity was offered. I'll tell you what, Otto: since she's still playing here I'll send you to the show."

"As it pleases you, Mr. Gootschild," Otto assented gloomily. "Why should n't I go, *und* try to forget for an evening that I am alive? *Da*, here comes that friend of yours, vhat ordered the only first-class meal that was ever served up in the Café Hirsch."

M. Farazounis entered, wrung Mr. Goodchild's hand effusively, slid into the chair that he now occupied nearly every afternoon.

"You have been sitting here all alone, my gentleman? Ah, that is too bad!"

"No, no; I've only just arrived. Otto, more coffee and some pastry."

"And a pack of Giubek cigarettes," M. Farazounis added carelessly, licking his flat, vermilion lips.

Aurelius enjoyed those hours with the Greek.

Constantine Farazounis had taken his predatory nose and

kinky mustaches into many countries. The near East supplied him with innumerable anecdotes. At his telling, Constantinople became a place of mystery and blood, with odalisks dropped into the Bosphorus in sacks, men thrown from minarets by giant negroes in frock-coats, lovers bound together and buried alive in a garden, severed heads rolled up in carpets. He had seen,—at least, he said that he had seen,—Arabian tribesmen gather for a desert war in twelfth-century chain-armor. He had watched the dervishes of Fezzan dance with daggers stuck through their cheeks. He had heard the prisoners of Samarkand intone the Koran in the eternal darkness of their dungeons.

He knew Egypt also, from the Delta to Khartûm. He was glib with the genealogy of the ancient kings, could draw on the table-top the seal of Cleopatra VII, remembered to an inch the length of all the galleries in the great pyramid.

It was when he talked of pyramids that he became mysterious. One day he broke forth:

"And they say, those archæologists, that nothing was ever there, or else it has been stolen by the Arabs! Ha! ha! those are nice jokes for me! Some time I shall open all their eyes — just as soon as I find a partner I can trust."

Mr. Goodchild inquired breathlessly:

"Was that what you meant when you spoke of the hidden treasures of a dynasty?"

M. Farazounis, batting his thick-fringed eyelids rapidly, held up his coffee-cup with a significant smile.

"To our secret!"

Solemnly they clinked their coffee-cups together.

On December twenty-third the Greek brought Aurelius a Christmas present — a small scarab of earth-colored stone, roughly carved on its reverse with the head of an Egyptian god. He whispered hoarsely:

"It comes from there!"

With a start, Mr. Goodchild dropped the relic into his coffee.

"The precious metals —" Farazounis darted glances all around him — "the precious metals and the jewels are still walled up in the inner chamber. Ah, my sir, if you could see what I seen when I remove that little block of granite like a peep-show! The crowns of pearls, the funeral tables thick with rubies, the mummy-masks with diamond eyes, the *ushebtî* figures made of a single emerald! And this little scarab, laying within ten feet of that for all these thousands thousands years!"

Aurelius racked his brain to think of a Christmas present that would be an adequate return. He ended by offering the Greek a malacca cane topped with a sphinx's head of solid gold.

On Christmas eve he found in the flower-market some imitation holly, the red berries attached to the green leaves by wires. Late that night he stole like a burglar into his daughters' rooms to spread this foliage on the bureaus round his presents. He had just finished when he fell over Thallie's rocking-chair. The girls, awake all the while, pretended not to hear that rumpus.

With the first rays of sunlight began the scurrying in negligee from gift to gift, the cries of delight, the kisses in payment, the whole gay confusion that attended all the Goodchilds' Christmas mornings. Romping from room to room, the sisters lost a dozen years, recalled the pet-names of childhood, raised old songs associated with the jingling of sleigh-bells. In the street, looking up at the pension balcony, the vegetable hucksters were amazed to see two beaming faces framed in auburn braids, to hear two clear young voices carol, with an enchanting accent of good-fellowship:

"God bless you, merry gentlemen,
May nothing you dismay,
For Christ our Lord and Saviour
Was born on Christmas day!"

Camillo came to share their Christmas dinner.

In one corner of the red dining-room stood a fir-tree dressed with tapers, glass balls, and shredded tinsel. All the tables were decked with mistletoe. Federico, with a dreadful scowl of solemnity that made him look the blackest villain of the Spanish Main, presented the plum-pudding in a dish of flames.

But even the Pension Schwandorf was not like home, even this dinner was not equal to the fine old feasts of Maple Lane. Now, though replete, they longed for some of Frossie's turkey-dressing, Thallie's mince-pie, Aglaia's cranberry jelly molded like a rabbit. Poor Aggie! Was she thinking of them now?

Their faces fell; sighs swelled their bosoms; each experienced a vague regret, a sense of something missed, a feeling that Christmas was not so jolly, after all.

M. Alphonse Zolande was of the same opinion.

The painting-teacher sat in a cheap little restaurant across the Arno, a hole in the wall, frequented by poor government clerks and artisans. On this night of family reunions the place was almost deserted. Three cab-drivers, lounging in a corner, were the only ones to comment on the lean, gray-mustached Parisian, whose dapper shabbiness was an epitome of ruined expectations.

M. Zolande, smoking his after-dinner cigarette, was thinking of the past.

He recalled his youth, when failure, like death, had been a calamity that might befall others, but could never threaten him. He remembered his hopes; he was to be the best painter in the world.

His first work had seemed to him more wonderful than the masterpieces in the Louvre. He could hardly complete his courses, so great was his impatience for the medals, the government commissions, the high applause, the lucrative and amorous rewards of genius. Adventuring to Rome, he had been intoxicated by the fame of those whose works he saw about him. On the Pincian Hill, he had gazed across the Eternal City with the thought, "Henceforth you are all mine, old planet — your treasures, your laurel wreaths, your beautiful women, and your friendly smiles!" But twenty-five years had passed, and now, on Christmas night, he sat friendless in a foreign restaurant for cabmen. All that survived from those bright days was one canvas, ridiculously vast, portraying in bombastic style "The Defeat of Cyrus by Tamyris, Queen of the Massagetæ."

If that picture had been another's, he would have laughed at it; the fact that it was his prevented him from seeing its absurdities. That was one reason for his failure?

He started homeward. The narrow streets of Oltr' Arno were obscured by mist, below unilluminated, but above, where ancient house-walls seemed to heel together, transected by thin shafts of yellow light. From behind the solid shutters, all closed against the chill, there issued faint sounds of laughter and music.

Monsieur Zolande, walking on through cobbled lanes, reflected that his dreams of love had been no better realized than his dreams of fame.

As a young man, fed on novels of Balzac and his imitators, the Frenchman had looked forward to a day when some fair creature, elegant, opulently fashioned, with all the mysterious sophistication that impresses youth, should surrender to him in a boudoir scented by smoldering pastiles, where gilt cupids dimpled between looped-up draperies of Genoa velvet. His Parisian cynicism had not poisoned his

own hopes: that romance of his was to last through many years of moonlight, balmy zephyrs, haunting melodies. Ending at last, it was to furnish his maturity with memories full of tenderness and pride. But she had not come into his life, that wondrous lady. All the fields of love which he had found had been, in comparison with his ideal garden of delights, like the court-yard of a squalid inn, marked with the footprints and abandoned rubbish of ignoble travelers who had passed before him. And the twenty-five years had passed, and the man of fifty was not attracted by the charms that had engrossed the boy. The fair phantasm, changing so gradually that he scarcely marked its alteration, was no longer elegant, but unaffected, not sophisticated, but naïve, not ripely opulent, but informed with *Primavera's* maddening young simplicity.

He climbed the four flights in Via de' Bardi and unlocked the studio door. A faint fragrance stole out from the close room — a fragrance that had survived the paint and cigarette-smoke of this lonely day; an indefinable sweetness, maybe not material at all, which made his heart leap, as if Thallie were there before him in the shadows.

Lighting the lamp, he examined the study on her easel.

It was the sketch of a peasant-woman in festal finery, hair sleekly coiffed, ear-rings a-dangle, parti-colored shawl. This picture, which Thallie had made without a hint from him, was the first sharp test of her individuality and promise. And Zolande, holding up the lamp, knew that this canvas was the supreme test, also, of his honesty.

For the man who could not discern the faults in "Tamyris, Queen of the Massagetæ," saw clearly enough that Thallie would never become a notable painter.

Had it been another pupil, he would have felt no qualms about the deception. His sense of shame stirred only because the victim of his fraud was Thallie. But shame,

which might for Thallie's sake have tipped the balance even against the money that these lessons brought him, could not outweigh the fear that if he told the truth she would never come to him again.

Zolande could not bear that thought.

She was so fresh, so redolent of May, so exquisite in her newly budded beauty! These months of nearness to her had been like wine, now making him oblivious to his gray hairs, now stimulating the ardors that had long been smothered in his heart. At last he regarded her with the desperate avidity of an aging man who wants to make one final snatch at his departed youth.

Perhaps destiny still meant him to realize his hopes? Perhaps courage was all he needed?

Occasionally, when she had left him, her head crammed full of his artful anecdotes, he wondered, "Surely she knows by this time what I'm driving at? To-day, in the long silence when she smiled in that new way, was the moment to declare myself?"

His infatuation was rising to its crisis.

"And my sketch," she asked him, the day after Christmas. "It really and truly shows some promise?"

"Your sketch is excellent. Last night I examined it again, and found that you've grasped in some way a trick of Giorgione's. See here, in this head, how you've separated the modeling from the color, and worked on each in turn. Did I teach you that? No, you found it out yourself. When such solid treatment comes by instinct, there is no doubt of the artistic gifts."

"Really?"

"Of course. Come, now, to-day we might do it again. On a white canvas we draw very mildly, spread a flat, transparent stain, lay in the flesh with bluish-black and white —

"But the model?"

"That species of calf sends her excuses for to-day. No matter. *Tiens!* I have it. To fix the method in our mind, we shall copy my new replica of Giorgione's 'Maltese Knight.' "

He dragged out his latest counterfeit and propped it on a chair beside the easel. Thallie set to work enthusiastically.

The sun's rays, passing through muslin screens, filled the studio with a diluted light. This radiance was still strong enough, however, to warm the bleak, gray walls, and spread a golden lacquer on the bare stone floor. It glinted also on some metallic threads in the fabric of the divan, it revived faintly in that threadbare pattern the luster of a former day, associated with who knows what optimistic reveries.

As usual, Zolande paced the floor, smoked, wriggled his fingers, twitched at his mustaches. But planting himself beside the easel, he announced unsteadily:

"Princess Tchernitza has returned at last. She has sent me a pupil, another *sacré* Bulgarian! He comes to work to-morrow."

Thallie looked up at him with beaming eyes.

"Well, I'm so glad!"

"Ah, you are glad."

"But, certainly. Is n't it good luck for you?"

"Good luck," he cried, in a voice that almost took on the tone of youth—"good luck that I must say adieu to all these hours just for you and me?"

A long silence ensued. She sat there staring and staring at her canvas, stunned, aware for the first time of her isolation here, oppressed by a gathering dread.

But her common sense rebelled; it was incredible that this old man could be serious. She faltered:

"Why, yes; it has been cozy, has n't it?"

Even that response made him dare to take the plunge.

"You find it so, too! Then he shall not come, that miserable pupil! Ah, heavens, yes; I will do without him now! Just you and I through these delicious mornings! Just you and I, my angel, my little Thallie!"

He was in for it now. Thumping down on his knees beside her chair, he tried to embrace her.

She evaded him with a convulsive spring. The easel fell over. The palette went spinning into a corner. She backed against the wall, panting, wild-eyed, one sleeve in ribbons. She tore off her gingham apron and threw it upon the floor.

"Oh, you old wretch!"

He scrambled to his feet, ran forward, chattered like an imbecile:

"No! no! Listen to me! See, you don't understand!"

And doubtless to show her that she did n't understand, he caught her to his breast.

His leathery countenance, with its yellowish eyeballs and gray bristles, was distorted like a Japanese mask, grotesque, yet displaying the pathetic struggle of a soul that vainly seeks expression. He wanted to utter in one phrase all his loneliness, all his longings, all his adoration. But he could not recognize this girlish face transformed by fury, this vigorous young body that fought him like a wild thing, these pretty hands, astonishingly quick, which struck and scratched at him. Even amid his terrible excitement he realized that the soft maiden of his dreams had been transformed into a vixen. Still clinging in desperation to the stranger, he babbled more frantically than ever:

"No! no! For God's sake, listen! You don't understand!"

At last she planted a blow between his eyes. He staggered back, caught his heels in the easel, sat down with a

crash on his counterfeit of Giorgione's "Maltese Knight." His nose was bleeding.

She fled from the room.

On the top staircase the rattle of her feet made one continuous sound; on the second flight her head began to swim; on the third she lost a slipper; on the fourth she tripped, plunged headlong, landed squarely in the arms of a man who had just entered from the street. The shock did not throw him off his balance. Two strong hands held her safe; that pressure, firm, yet gentle, brought her to her senses. Beyond surprise, she recognized John Holland.

She sank in a heap upon the steps. She gasped hysterically:

"See, I've taken your advice! I've stopped my lessons up there!" Her hand clutched at her torn sleeve, but that damage could not be concealed. She bowed her head. In a choking voice full of shame, maybe penitent as well, she whispered, "Please don't tell dad!"

"Of course not," John Holland answered gravely. "We'll just tell dad the truth — that I dropped in to see how you were getting on, and that you and I decided you'd make better progress somewhere else."

"Oh, thank you!"

Tears gushed from her eyes. She wiped her cheeks with trembling hands.

He waited, wiser than those who would have offered pity, till the first signs of convalescence — till Thallie began to put her curls to rights. Then he suggested:

"We'll take a little walk before we venture home. You'll need a hat for that."

"My hat! And my hand-bag! And I've lost a slipper, too!"

"Wait here," he admonished her, and climbed the stairs.

He walked into the studio. Zolande stood there shaking,



"See, I've taken your advice! I've stopped my lessons up there!"



moaning, dabbing a gory paint-rag to his nose. But the Frenchman recoiled at sight of this tall, thick-set man, whose dress, in its compromise between fastidiousness and nonchalance, bespoke the natural aristocrat, whose rugged visage expressed calm certitude of mastery in any situation. The painting-teacher raised his arms in a limp gesture of appeal, as if he already felt those large hands round his throat.

John Holland's face was grim. He took a forward step; but just in time he managed to appraise the other with his customary vision, which proceeded from his sympathetic insight into human nature. His keen glance, sweeping round the room, absorbed a life's whole history. In a flash — perhaps by the assistance of another thought — he understood the cause of this offense as clearly as if he himself had been Zolande.

Clapping his hand on the Parisian's shoulder, he said:

"My friend, it can't be done."

Zolande, as if his bones had been suddenly removed, collapsed on the tattered divan.

All the way down-stairs a dreadful, strangled sob re-echoed in John Holland's heart — the cry of one who had made a last desperate snatch at his departed youth.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THALLIE DONS THE PRETTIEST GOWN THAT SHE HAS
EVER WORN

WITH the New-year, cold rains swept down across Tuscany; the city turned gloomy; the paths of the pension garden were covered with sodden petals. Thallie and Frossie accused John Holland of bringing the winter to Florence.

"Maybe so," he replied, with a smile that puzzled them. "Even though I came from the south!"

He had come from Rome, he said, to check up, in the Archæological Museum, a recent find of Etruscan relics. Once more the sisters thought it strange that so obvious a man of the world should spend his time examining black jars from the tombs of a vanished race. They discovered that he even had a valet concealed at the Hotel Alexandra, two squares away, on the Arno. In fact, he completely upset their ideas of a scholar.

Yet they read in the "*Revue des Deux Mondes*" that John Holland was among the most brilliant of the younger historians. The word "younger" perplexed them.

"Then a man past forty," Frossie asked, "is considered young?"

"A man past fifty, no doubt," replied Thallie, bitterly.

And again the sisters, in silent indignation, considered M. Zolande, who had sinned all the more in tarnishing their ideals of love.

They were grateful that Mr. Holland had never mentioned the scene in Via de' Bardi. He told Aurelius only

that Zolande was not the best teacher for Thallie. The father replied :

" If you say so, sir, then that 's the end of it. I bow to your critical judgment, which I know has been formed by the study of art from its first primeval efforts. But what a pity that Thallie's work can't go on, like Frossie's, without the need of instruction ! "

" Without the need of instruction ? "

" What I mean is this. A good painter must have studied the essentials of painting for many years ; but a novelist, after a sound acquaintance with Hill and Webster, no longer goes to school, except possibly to nature. "

John Holland' lost no time in putting Frossie through an examination.

He found that all her criticisms unconsciously favored truth. She had an innate sense of harmony and proportion, an instinctive dislike of certain great formless novels accepted by many as masterpieces. Regarding style, she resented the claptrap phrases, the turgid, and the hysterical. Her favorite medium was a simple running prose, graceful, musical, various, distinguished by a discreet distribution of color. At last she showed him some pages of her romance. In her own work Frossie had violated her every artistic conviction !

" You see, " he explained, " we climb toward our ideals by a long and arduous road. But possibly your historical setting impedes you. I 've never seen but one good attempt in that line, Flaubert's ' Salammbô. ' A *tour de force*, a fine curiosity, but not what you 're after — a real interpretation of life. Suppose you inspect the present again, which you ought to find quite as thrilling as the past. "

Another time he persuaded Thallie to show him her studies in oil.

While setting the canvases round on the parlor chairs,

she made some flurried excuses. This one, in the manner of Titian, she meant to do over again; that head, in Raphael's style, she had dashed off in half a day; she knew that the figure after Rubens was all out of drawing. Midway between apprehension and pride, with a breathless laugh, she protested:

"In fact, I'm afraid they're awful. I should n't have shown them to you."

And she fixed her eyes imploringly on Holland, who viewed each sketch with the care of a judge at the Salon.

In his suit of rough gray homespun, his gaiters spotless, his blue cravat set off with a large black pearl, this big, strong-looking, self-possessed man could still be uncomfortably impressive. So, as he made no comment at once, Thallie hastened to add:

"Besides, I'm not going on in these lines. The old masters are wonderful, of course, but we moderns should find our own methods. All our twentieth-century revolts should extend to art, don't you think? Individualism, you know. To express one's self, and only one's self, intensely."

He did not smile.

"In that case," he said, "you'll do what all great artists have tried to do."

"Ah," she exclaimed, as happy as if he had praised her work to the skies — so happy, indeed, that she did not realize his failure to praise it at all.

"And I'm not going to try for another teacher just yet. I want to be unhampered awhile. Then, too —" She looked away — "I've sort of lost my nerve about studios."

"Of course," he responded. "To work alone for a while won't do you the slightest harm."

"I'm so glad you agree with me!"

Next morning Thallie set up an easel at home, with the door-porter's eldest child as a model.

She now aimed at such swift and decisive painting as some one — George Moore, perhaps — attributed to Manet. She was also obsessed by tales she had read of artists whose fame was founded on tints that nobody had ever discerned before. Squinting hard at the door-porter's daughter, she tried to reduce that puerile, olive-hued face to its component colors. This flesh, she decided, was really composed, in the light, of amethyst, orange, and emerald particles, in the shadows of ultramarine and mauve. Forthwith she smeared in some green and lavender patches with startling effect. No matter; this picture was meant to be seen from a distance.

Thallie, released from all restraint, was turning Impressionist!

But presently she sat motionless, drooping, distrait. Was it possible that she missed the studio in Via de' Bardi, the cigarette-smoke, the quick step on the floor, the nervous voice reproving, suggesting, recounting the stories of nineteenth-century Paris? Poor old Zolande, marooned over there with his wild Bulgarian pupil, his counterfeits, his remorse! After all, his outbreak had been a compliment, in a way?

Thallie was sorry, now, that she had made his nose bleed. Still, it was all his fault?

"Not quite," she admitted. "I ought to have seen what was coming." She blushed because she had been so ingenuous to the last. "What a little ninny I was! Well, at least, that won't happen twice. No matter what they pretend, they'll never fool me again!" And, trying to frown severely, but showing her dimples willy-nilly in a half-rueful smile, Thallie considered the world of men, a fine lot of wolves in sheep's clothing. She made only three exceptions — her father, Mr. Holland, and Reginald Dux of course.

Reginald, alas! still stayed in Paris. Encouraged by this

apparent defection, Lieutenant Fava redoubled his calls at the pension.

The Sicilian made no more dramatic proposals of marriage. His present game was to twirl his rat-tail mustaches despondently, send worshiping looks from his slanting eyes, shake his long, narrow head as if at some hopeless dream, and smuggle away, not too secretly, a flower that the adored one had dropped. These sad, subservient manners, this mien of the classic prisoner of love, ended by boring Thallie. Her manner toward Fava grew condescending and careless. For all his boasted experience, he had not perceived that this maiden was meant to find her emotional complement in mastery, not in submission.

Sometimes, at the little restaurant that served the three lieutenants in place of a mess-room, Fava expressed his chagrin.

"Devil take it! when I went at her with horse, foot, and guns, she condescended to pardon me like a queen. And now, when I crawl on my hands and knees and sigh like a bellows, she lifts up her nose all the more. Accidents to that accursed pig of a Reginaldo! Camillo, find out for me if they are really affianced."

"Affianced!" Azeglio exclaimed. "One would think they were married, the way they went out walking alone."

"That's the American custom," Camillo informed him.

"Ah! ah!" Fava winked, wagged his head, screwed up his face in a hideous grin. "The American this, the American that! I have yet to see an American composed of a face and a pair of little pink wings, like the cherubs in holy pictures!"

Camillo, laying down knife and fork, calmly remarked:

"In discussing that girl, remember she may soon be my sister-in-law."

"Have I said anything at all defamatory? I even accept

her American walks with that wretch. I even pass over one time when I saw her and him in Giacinta's — yes, sitting there openly, those two alone, and drinking a cup of tea! Could I offer more proof of my respect for the character of your sister-in-law?"

Azeglio, kicking Camillo under the table, suggested:

"You'll stop all those American tricks when you've married her, though?"

"Oh, then, to be sure," declared Fava, "she'll have to learn a few lessons. But that bird is still in the tree."

"Courage!" Camillo laughed. "Put on a mask and propose at the carnival ball."

"By the way," Azeglio inquired, "when the carnival ball comes along, shall we have to invite them? A box costs a hundred lire, you know."

The faces of the three lieutenants grew long.

That night, in barracks, Camillo counted his savings, shrugged, blew out the lamp, sat down to review his condition.

The light from the troopers' dormitories passed over the courtyard and entered his room, a small white chamber arranged with that neat simplicity which distinguishes the born soldier. Here stood his military chest, there his narrow bed, and, over his varnished boots precisely alined against the wall, hung his uniforms, caps, brass helmet, revolver, and long, straight sword. Near the window, beside the shaving-shelf, were tacked some photographs of his parents and sisters. A table covered with books, a lamp, and an arm-chair, completed his property.

In the courtyard a trumpet wailed the *silenzio*. The lights, except one in each dormitory, went out. Camillo looked up at the moon, which was struggling, like a soul in the toils of circumstance, to break through the clouds. His face of a young medieval knight grew firm.

"Since I cannot give my children a fortune, they must have honors, honors, and honors. Ah, yes, I'll have to rise quickly now. If only another war would come! And yet, the last war might have been kinder to me?"

He recalled Tripoli. He saw the desert, the swarming camps in oases, the troop-trains crawling through clouds of sand, the flutter and flash of Bedouin scouts far off in the dunes. He heard the concussion of field-guns, the rattle of rifle-fire, the trumpets blowing the charge, the tumult of five hundred voices all shouting together, "*Avanti! Savoia!*" Heaven knows, he had done his best there to attract his superiors' notice! But they, after giving him the medal for valor, had straightway forgotten him.

He ought to show those old fellows in Rome that he was different from most lieutenants of lancers.

Camillo had not been content with learning cavalry tactics and memorizing historic problems of strategy. For years, as if Italy's future depended upon his knowledge, he had studied the regimen, equipment, and field-work of infantry, the transportation of ammunition and food, the latest, most intricate forms of intrenchment, the conduct of sieges, ballistics, powders, projectiles — the whole complicated science of modern warfare. And nothing interested him more than the new coöperation of aëroplanes and artillery.

But a day of battle might come when the aviators had all been disabled, when volunteers would be needed to soar and spy, in order to save a brigade, a division, an army. That would be the chance for him if he knew how to fly.

One day he revisited Baron di Campoformio.

The Villa Campoformio, in the countryside north of Florence, was a white stucco house in a spacious garden of ilex- and cypress-trees. High walls, surmounted by large stone urns, inclosed the grounds: one rang a bell in the gate-post, and, after five minutes or so, a man-servant in a

green baize apron pushed back the bolts. Camillo, dismounting, left his horse with this servitor. The baron, clad in an old tweed coat, his thin hair blown by the breeze, his boots incrustated with loam, was helping the gardener tie up the rose-bushes with straw.

Campoformio led Camillo into the drawing-room, a large apartment hung with yellow brocade, where a sporting widower's tastes had almost eclipsed the influence of the dead American wife. Another servant brought vermuth and seltzer, cigarettes and cigars. The baron's weather-beaten face wore a quizzical look as he asked:

"Well, Signore Icarus?"

Camillo smiled in turn.

"It's true," he confessed, "that I came to ask for a little ride in the sky."

"Oh, I knew you would. It was easy to see that you'd never rest till you'd driven a biplane yourself. Am I right?"

"I should like to do that, too."

"Good enough! The more of us that can fly, the worse we shall beat the Austrians. I take it you're not afraid of heights?"

"I was born on a mountain."

"Your nerves are all right in these fatal days of peace?"

Camillo held out his strong brown hands, palms down, with fingers spread, at arm's length. They did not move any more than if carved out of Pavonazzetto marble.

"Bravo! A cavalry officer able to do that in Florence must have a constitution of iron—or be related to all the saints!"

They rode down to the flying-field. A biplane, propelled by mechanics and field-hands, emerged from its hangar.

Campoformio insisted that Camillo also put on a fleeced-lined jacket, an aviator's helmet, and gloves. Well muffled,

they climbed the frame, the pilot taking the steering-seat, the passenger the perch behind, against the gasoline-tank. The baron raised his hand in the air. A mechanic gave the propeller a whirl and darted away. The engine began a deafening clatter. The biplane moved forward gently, then faster and faster. Camillo realized that the ground was ten, twenty, thirty feet beneath him, and blurred by the speed of this flight.

Suddenly they shot up a steep hill of air, ran level, shot up again. The pressure of wind seemed to flatten Camillo's chest; he could hardly expel his breath. The oxygen that rushed into his lungs made him feel drunk. He wanted to laugh aloud, to shout in triumph, to shake his fist at the clouds. He felt as if he had never really lived till this moment.

With a nod, Campoformio bade him look down.

On every side the earth was unrolling in billows, hills flattening, highways and villages dwindling, forests melting to patches of grayish haze. Far behind, through the brilliant, transparent disk produced by the whirling propellers, Camillo saw Florence shrinking like some magical carpet of brown and silvery mottles, like Balzac's *peau de chagrin*, which diminished at every wish. The Arno became a thread; the heights beyond sank into their valleys, and Mount Cuccioli, slowly crumbling, was lost in the distance.

Camillo looked ahead. Mount Rinaldi, Fiesole, Mount Ceceri, were bowing before this miracle, this great bird, ridden by men, that swept over them at the altitude of two thousand feet. The white hamlets whirled round and scattered like chickens below the hawk. The hill streams, all their secrets revealed, writhed in their channels and wriggled away to the south. And ahead, the snow-capped mountains, so haughty till now in their supremacy, were be-

ginning to crouch, like ranks of cowardly Titans preparing for flight.

"Now I know how God feels in his heavens!" Camillo thought. "At last man comes into his own! At last our divinity abases the world!" And, to Campoformio, who was looking back at him strangely, he gave an exalted, dazed smile.

"Are you dizzy?" the pilot demanded, his howl no more than a sigh in the roar of engine and wind.

"Go on! go on! go on!" cried Camillo. The words, driven back into his throat, set him to coughing.

The baron put the *aéroplane* round in a banking curve, descended five hundred feet at one swoop, raced homeward. Florence, creeping forth over the rim of the world, expanded from a puddle to a wide, flashing lake of roofs. The hills beyond, as the biplane dipped again, emerged from bluish mists, regained their courage, held up their heads as before. Below appeared pastures that seemed like tablecloths raised to catch the *aéroplane* safe in their folds. And into their folds the machine descended so softly that one could hardly tell when it left the air and ran on the ground.

A few rods away two hangars appeared. Familiar faces surrounded the biplane — the faces of the baron's mechanics. What, they had skimmed the world and unerringly regained this obscure little spot?

Camillo was further amazed to learn that they had flown only thirteen minutes.

Campoformio gave him another keen glance.

"You were dizzy up there?"

"Not at all. I felt a bit tipsy at first."

"Next time you won't notice that. If, indeed, you wish to continue?"

"Continue! Nothing can stop me now!"

"Then look here; while you're at it, why not go after the

military brevet for aviators? I'll be your teacher, and guaranty that in two months' time you'll pass the tests with flying colors."

"But that is too much to ask of you."

"Nonsense! I hope we two can engage in a patriotic act."

Camillo, overjoyed, accepted the baron's offer.

He made haste to tell Frossie of his intention. But she, looking frightened, protested:

"Not aëroplanes, too!"

He laughed indulgently.

"That old omnibus is as safe as a boat. The air is n't a void, after all, but a big, soft cushion, buoyant and strong, like the sea. And to think we humans have been so long in finding it out!"

Mr. Goodchild, at least, understood Camillo's enthusiasm. Long ago Aurelius had thought of inventing the flying-machine himself; but other projects had intervened, and finally some one else had grasped the laurels that might have been his.

"Still," he reflected, his old ardor renewed by Camillo's adventure, "the science of aviation is n't perfected yet. Above all, there's a need of some infallible safety-device. If I went to work on it, devoted my mind entirely to the problem, most likely I could put an end to the accidents. But of course that kind of research would soon require a workshop."

He thought of a certain workshop across the sea, of a little ramshackle house, of Maple Lane, and all the surrounding vistas. The countless friendly aspects of Zenasville rose before him again, their attractiveness intensely enhanced by distance and time. It seemed like many years since he had bade those dear regions good-by.

But now and then letters reached him from home.

Dr. Numble, a faithful correspondent, was still at work on the *magnum opus* — St. Louis of France was passing into a new incarnation. Ira Inchkin, for all his complaints about the hardware business, found time to describe his wife's latest feat on the town-hall stage. Her portrayal of *Hedda Gabler* had "knocked the breath right out of the 'Zenasville Recorder's' dramatic critic." Selina Inchkin, for her part, neglected to dwell on that triumph. Perhaps she was too much excited by Aggie's wedding. She wrote:

Would a thousand times that I had been with you at those nuptials! Radiant as the dawn, I see my precious Aglaia descending from the bliss-embowered altar, clinging with fond, shy sweetness to the strong arm of he who henceforth shall be her sturdy oak, her one in all, her soul-mate! How nature must have warbled its hymns of joy in that solemn and beauteous blend, when they who previously mankind had known as twain were united into one, by Heaven's holy ordinance! And so they went forth into life, like unto a symphony of angel's wings, tender and true, as Poe says, "evermore."

Aurelius, as he folded up this rhapsody, mused:

"Good, warm-hearted folks, eager to share our joys, and willing to share our griefs! Old friends are good. Yes, yes, old friends, old places, old habits are hard to lose."

He was then sitting at his favorite table in the Café Hirsch. A cup of coffee smoked before him, and by the table the waiter, Otto, drooped in melancholy rumination. On all sides sat painters, poets, journalists, some shabby, many lean and pale, most of them distinguished by curious dress and airs. Their chatter was unintelligible; they did not glance at Mr. Goodchild; their whole little circle buzzed on, day after day, oblivious to the stranger. Yet there was scarcely one of their enthusiasms that Aurelius could not have shared and understood, if they had given him the chance and he had spoken half a dozen foreign languages.

Even Constantine Farazounis seemed to have deserted him.

"So," said Otto, in the born pessimist's sepulchral tones of satisfaction, "to-day already you feel lonely, Mr. Goots-child, yust like me!"

"For the moment I was thinking of my own home. But, as Epictetus has written, 'When you have lost anything external, keep in mind what you have got instead of it.' And somewhere else he tells us, 'Be pleased with the present, and contented with whatever it's the season for.' No, Otto, to be lonely, or, in other words, discontented, is to be ungrateful, is to reproach Divine Providence, which is wiser than we are, and brings all changes for our ultimate benefit."

And fortified by these thoughts, oblivious of Otto's sour grimace, Aurelius got out his writing-pad and briskly set to work.

He was now busy with a play, composed in the Shaksperian manner, intended to be acted in the Pension Schwandorf. For his subject he had chosen the fable of Donatello's death. This theme, however, he had embellished with inventions of his own: a wife expressed piety and devotion, a daughter was courted by a good young sculptor, a villain plotted and was worsted by a comic cobbler, a friar moralized in epilogue. But the drama, every day expanding more and more, soon threatened to comprise eight acts. This worried Aurelius till he remembered that the Bard himself had used a bare stage simply draped, with placards to designate a palace, an anteroom, a street, and so on. The scenery could be entirely dispensed with!

He read the completed play to Mme. von Schwandorf. Her opinion was:

"We have never had anything like this before. It is fit to bring the house down! Only, you have left no place for a tarantella dance."

"A tarantella!"

"Just so. In our pension theatricals, there comes every winter, for the past fifteen years, an Austrian lady to dance the tarantella. She is now an institution. Besides, if we left her out, it might perhaps break her heart?"

"But I hardly see, in a serious work like this —"

"Oh, pshaw, there is always some place to squeeze her in. Take for instance that scene where *Donatello* has made the statue of Saint George. 'Behold,' says somebody, sticking his head in the door, 'here comes the merry Florentines to dance at your success!' All right, in she pops, in her fancy peasant costume, and does the tarantella."

"Well, well," Aurelius stammered, smoothing his beard with agitated fingers, "I'll do my best for her."

"Certainly! To a gentleman and a man of genius everything is possible."

At Mme. von Schwandorf's call for actors, a crowd of strangers came trooping to the pension — young Italians who spoke extraordinary English, American girls whose parents were local dentists and physicians, some British maiden ladies, a half-pay Irish major, a clerk from the English bank, a student of singing — an apple-cheeked youth from Nebraska — who had "met d'Annunzio socially."

It was soon decided that no one could fill the rôle of *Donatello* so well as Mr. Goodchild. Besides, *Donatello* would have nine hundred lines to learn.

The rehearsals progressed but slowly. The actors did not seem able to gather at one time. But the fatal date approached, and pride, overcoming flightiness, at last induced concerted action. In the last few days of grace all appeared on the dot, anxious, their slips of manuscript in hand, their lines apparently as good as learned. Aurelius, hearing the phrases of his brain ring out in the red dining-

room, felt the glow of the dramatist who finally glimpses fame.

Frossie and Thallie had declined two excellent parts, the former because she feared to seem ridiculous to Camillo, the latter because she felt that Reginald might return in time to laugh at the whole affair. However, they cut out their father's costume.

At the final rehearsal everything went badly: all memories failed; disaster seemed inevitable.

The great night arrived.

One end of the dining-room was filled by a proscenium, the stage on trestles, the footlights arranged before curtains of red velveteen. In front rows of chairs extended to the walls. Behind the back-drop a narrow area was left as gathering-place for the performers.

The cast appeared early in their costumes. Their wigs and grease-paint made them strange to one another: each newcomer was greeted with hysterical laughter. All were thrilled by excitement, by trepidation which they concealed beneath a ghastly mirth.

The Nebraskan, as the good young sculptor, wore sky-blue tights, a plush coat with leg-of-mutton sleeves, a sugar-loaf hat. The English bank-clerk, as a villainous member of the Signiory, had a brigand's beard and a scarlet robe like a night-gown, trimmed with cotton. The Irish major, as the comic cobbler, sported a leather apron, a thatch of orange-colored hair, a putty nose of riper color even than his own. Mr. Goodchild, in the character of *Donatello*, was more interesting still. Taller and leaner, apparently, than ever in his sable hose and surtout, he seemed, with his grizzled hair and beard, his deep-set burning eyes, his gaunt, fine visage, like some fifteenth century *Don Quixote*.

The ladies promised to attract attention also.

A British dame, cast for the part of *Donatello's Wife*,

was costumed like *Marguerite* in "Faust." *Donatello's Daughter* provided a pleasant contrast in a gown suggestive of Byzantium a thousand years ago, or Paris yesterday. The tarantella dancer appeared in her gay Sicilian peasant-dress. One frightened little woman, who was to play the faithful servant, had forgotten that no fifteenth-century housemaid was ever blessed with French heels.

Aurelius shook his head despondently, climbed to the stage, peeped through the curtains.

The audience was gathering.

The patrons of the pension had long since preëmpted the front seats: the strangers could only fling themselves upon the chairs behind. Already, in the center of the room, were wedged together a hundred persons whom Mr. Goodchild had never seen before — Italians and foreigners, old folk and youngsters, officers with silver epaulets, vivacious ladies with bare shoulders. The sight of all these unknown guests dismayed Aurelius. What if he could not reach them with his play? What if they didn't warm to his performance?

With a distracted gesture he rejoined his colleagues.

The piano sounded the first notes of the overture. A tremor ran among the actors packed behind the stage. Some showed a wild sort of bravado. Others stood in a daze, their lips moving, their brains numbly groping at half-forgotten lines. The little woman who was to play the faithful housemaid sat huddled in a corner, deathly white beneath her paint, her teeth chattering, like one about to be summoned to the scaffold. As the overture ceased, all realized that she could not go on, to dust the table and speak the first, explanatory lines.

"Never mind," cried Aurelius, in a voice of anguish, "we'll begin with the second episode."

The curtains parted.

Scene, *Donatello's* studio. Enter a delegation of notable Florentines, to see what progress the master is making with his statue of St. George. But *Donatello*, according to his daughter, is walking in the suburbs —

“As is his wont when burthened with despair
Such as to every eager soul must come
Who contemplates the difference between
The talents that he knows in him exist
And that which he would do.”

The member of the Signiory, pointing to a plaster cast covered over with a sheet, suggests, in tones which may be due either to villainy or timidity:

“Let us at least, fair maid, remove the cloth
From off the present progress of his efforts,
In order that our valuable time
May not be spent in waiting his return.”

But the good young sculptor, suddenly appearing, retorts defiantly, with his Nebraska accent:

“Nay, nay, proud Signior, your intention is
As plain to me as Phœbus's bright car
While traveling the zenith at high noon!
Well do you know that at this stage of labor,
When all the marble's future merit still
Exists but in the master's teeming brain,
To view yon work with eyes unclarified
By Donatello's tale of his intentions
Would be to fill all minds with anxious doubts
Or even cause th' withdrawal of his contract;
And thus, diverting from him fame and wealth —
E'en quenching with chagrin his vital spark —
Bring nearer to your grasp a certain jewel
Which now's beyond your reach. Ah, no, gadzooks,
Not while this heart retains a single beat
Shall you remove from off that cast the sheet!”

The *Signior*, clutching at his brigand's beard, falls back discomfited. *Donatello's Daughter*, staring at the good young sculptor, quavers :

" I seem to see in a new light this youth
Who serves as an apprentice to my father :
Now his apprenticeship is knightly grown,
More like the squire of a noble lord,
And nobler his habitual lineaments.
O Heavens ! is this love that fills my breast ?
But see, good folk, here comes my father now."

Enter slowly Aurelius, wildly gazing, as if in a trance. Ignoring every one, stretching out his hand like a somnambulist, he utters, in the tones and cadences of those lost Saturday nights in Zenasville :

" Now have I found, among the flow'ry groves,
In what we mortals take for solitude,
The answer to my prayers ! I see Saint George
As never statue was since ancient times —
Not formal, natural, not stone, but flesh,
Not following old rules, but making new ones !
Mine is the chisel that transmogrifies
The Middle Ages to the Renaissance,
And Donatello's name shall yet be ranked
With great Praxiteles and Phidias !
Stay, glorious vision, till I catch thee fast !
Stay, dream of art, for I must hand thee down
To future days ! Eureka ! I am he
Who sought and found to a new age the key ! "

The rest stood round in postures indicating awe. The curtains closed. The audience applauded generously.

Behind the back-drop, the actors congratulated one another, oblivious to *Donatello's Housemaid*, who sat dissolved in tears. They prophesied that the second act would go still better than the first. The Irish major, exuding strong

spirituous fumes, announced, with mysterious winks, that he was resolved to make the biggest hit of all.

In the second act, *Folco*, the good young sculptor, declared his love to *Donatello's Daughter, Maddalena*. The major, in other words the comic cobbler, offered to find a friar who would marry them at once. Leering benevolently, he explained:

"Projuice the ring, an' I will have um ready
Before the Signior, I mean that ould blagyard in the red dressin'-
gownd like, finds out phwat we're up to,
For once let um dishcover he's goin' to lose the gel,
An' he'll make blood flow like whisky!"

Mr. Goodchild, watching from the wings, gave a gasp of consternation. The major, suddenly revealed in a high state of liquor, was thickening his brogue and altering his lines to suit himself!

Aurelius heard his verses brutalized by this unspeakable vandal. He seemed to see his whole play destroyed before his eyes. He knew such emotion as the real Donatello would have felt, had he seen his statue of St. George smashed into fragments.

"For though I'm only a poor cobbler, Maddalena an' you, Mis-
ther Thingumbob, may the divil fly away wid your name,
whatever it is,
Under me leather apron, as the sayin' goes in County Anthrim,
Bates a heart fit to loan Ould Nick umself such a crack on the
jaw
That it's manny's the day before he'll ate sittin' down."

A roar of laughter cut Mr. Goodchild to the quick.

The audience, cheered by this unexpected flash of ribaldry amid the drama's gloom, incited the major to still worse behavior. That made the deepest wound in Mr. Goodchild's breast: they acclaimed the vulgar interruption more

genuinely than they had the earnest poem! "Ah," he thought, with an unprecedented bitterness that corroded all his being, "so this, at last, is the public!"

Ring down the curtain? No, let ruin be complete!

He staggered behind the back-drop. There the tarantella dancer pounced upon him. The *Housemaid*, whose business it was to usher in this corybante, still sat in the throes of stage-fright.

Mr. Goodchild passed a trembling hand across his brow.

"We'll arrange it somehow, ma'am. We'll find a way to get you on," he muttered mechanically.

The next moment his misery blotted the tarantella dancer from his mind.

The performers clustered at the entrances, cocked their ears, ran on the stage and off. "Your cue," called some one, and Aurelius faced the public that had betrayed his trust. He spoke his lines as if in a horrid dream.

The drama approached its climax. The affairs of *Folco* and *Maddalena* were overshadowed by the imminent fate of *Donatello*. The statue of St. George was done. All praised it to the skies except the villainous *Signior*, whose crafty comment was:

"My admiration's leavened with regret
Because, to my poor mind, this effigy
Still lacks one thing."

But what it lacked the wretch could not be made to tell.

At this criticism *Donatello* began to pine away. It was not perfect, then, the work that he had thought his masterpiece: it lacked one thing! What thing? At midnight, he appeared in the studio with a candle, knelt before the marble, prayed for a clearer vision that he might see the flaw, at last fell forward with a groan of hopelessness. In the next act he showed a ravaged countenance, moved feebly,

spoke in faltering tones, was obviously near to death. The *Signior's* words, like a subtle poison dropped into his veins, were gradually destroying him. When he pronounced the words —

“ All that I craved to be I am denied
By stricture of the public praise I strove for,
To which we artists turn like flowers to sun,
From which we draw the very breath of life — ”

he sent out across the footlights not the lamentation of an actor, but the cry of a lacerated heart. A hush fell upon the house: then, moved by this note of strange sincerity, the audience saluted the curtain with prolonged applause.

But Aurelius still felt that they had clapped louder at the major's japes.

In the next act *Donatello* came to die. He lay on his pallet, his family round him, the other characters grouped upstage. When his last moment was at hand, imploringly he addressed the *Signior*:

“ For one whose day is sped, I conjure you
By all the holy signs of high compassion,
Rend from your judgment the oracular veil —
What lacks Saint George? ”

The *Signior*, groveling on the ground, replied :

“ Now, surely, must remorse
Abate revenge in any bosom stored,
Besides with blackness, with that love of art
Which all imbibe from the sweet air of Florence !
Ah, Donatello, genius of them all,
I said Saint George still lacked one thing. 'T is true:
He only lacks — the breath of human life ! ”

At which, transfigured, *Donatello* cried out :

“ Now am I happy ! Now are all my pangs
Repaid by this last throb of exultation !

Burned out by ardent zeal, I lie consumed;
Yet my last flame darts up a brilliant beacon!
So much we sacrifice for beauty's sake,
That from the ash of our exhausted lives
Art, radiant phoenix, may emerge and soar
And light a higher heaven than before!"

He struggled up, his hands extended in a final gesture, his eyes already blank. The company sank to their knees; the wife hid her face in the counterpane; the lovers exchanged a look intended to be tremulous. At this solemn moment, all became aware of an incongruous figure in the tableau.

Beside the death-bed quailed the *Housemaid*, her face disordered by a wild determination to atone for her disgrace. While everybody stared at her in horror, she gulped forth, with a hiccough saved over from her weeping, these words which had been due three acts ago:

"Good master, here are come a merry troupe
Of Florentines to dance at your success!"

To the crash of a tambourine there whirled out upon the stage an Austrian spinster in a peasant's dress, her ribbons streaming, her bright, short petticoats aflutter, her elbows and ankles in commotion. And, as the pianist, with the aplomb of fifteen seasons, dashed his hands upon the keyboard, this frivolous intruder, this false note personified, began the tarantella.

Mercifully the curtains swung together.

Donatello, springing from his cot, escaped the stage. He heard the spectators in a tumult. Above the hand-clapping and the "bravos" rang a concerted shout:

"Author! Author! Author!"

Was it possible that they took this frantic finale for his own?

The Nebraskan caught him by the arm.

"Curtain calls! The audience want a speech."

A speech! A chance to vent their mockery on him face to face! Aurelius tore himself free. He rushed out, by a side-door, into the hall. The shouts pursued him:

"Author! Author! Author!"

Bizarre in his sable surtout, with whitened visage, with hair and beard on end, like some nimble, anguished ghost of other days he fled through the parlor, the garden, the glass corridor. His long black legs momentarily regained their youth as he leaped up the stairs. He reached his room, pushed the bolt, hurled himself into a chair, gave vent to a sob of immeasurable humiliation.

From far off a muffled uproar penetrated even this retreat:

"Author! Author! Author!"

O for an earthquake, the end of the world, oblivion!

But finally the demonstration ended. A great clatter of chairs ensued. The servants were clearing the dining-room for dancing.

Then came light steps in the corridor, soft knocks, gentle voices. His daughters were there, imploring him to let them in.

They entered with the flowers which they had meant to toss upon the stage, with comprehending eyes and tender kisses. They vowed that the spectators had not seen anything amiss.

"They're all saying what funny lines you gave the cobbler."

"They're complimenting you on ending with such a cheerful note."

"Ah," gasped Aurelius, closing his eyes and shivering.

Waltz-music pulsed faintly. Yet Frossie and Thallie only snuggled closer.

"You must go back, children. You, at least, must make a happy night of it."

"We can't be happy if you're sad."

"See, then. Presto, change! You've fixed me all right again!"

At last he persuaded them to leave him. But the two bouquets, which they had meant to toss to him across the footlights, remained on his writing-table like floral offerings scattered on a tomb.

Toward midnight, from his window, he saw Camillo and Frossie in the garden. The young soldier, in his pearl-gray cavalry cape, the young girl, in a pale satin cloak, stood close together, lost in each other's gaze. Before Aurelius could turn away, Camillo lifted Frossie's pince-nez and reverently kissed her eyelids.

"So soon!"

Presently the father's thoughts went out toward England, to Aglaia.

He strove to see her amid the moors of Devonshire, in the country-house of which she wrote so sparingly, among the Bellegrams, of whom she only said that "they were just what she had expected." Now, as often at night since she had gone away, Mr. Goodchild felt restless, was desolate with more than a fond parent's loneliness, grew apprehensive without cause, unless there came to him through space a faint thrill of travail from the brain he had begotten.

What if Aggie was unhappy at this moment!

She had a new life to learn, new points of view to conform to, new alliances to swear. Henceforth she would belong to her own race no more than to her father.

And here, in the garden, another international marriage was in preparation.

Thallie, at least, might marry an American, that Reginald Dux. But was her attachment to him really serious?

It seemed serious enough next day, when Reginald unexpectedly appeared in Florence.

He had finally lured the Ghillamoors from sleety Paris down into the Tuscan winter, which, knowing nothing about it, he vowed would afford the very climate to make little Rosalie quite well again. Hector Ghillamoor and his wife came to Florence none too confident of this, but, rather, prepared to take their child still farther south. An hour after their arrival at the Hotel Alexandra, just as a cold, hard rain set in, Reginald escaped them. He slipped away to the Pension Schwandorf. At his voice in the hall, Thalie laid both hands against her breast and closed her eyes.

With their first devouring glance, each found the other more desirable even than the cherished mental image. Their fingers touching, both suddenly felt impulse straining against convention's barrier. It seemed incredible that they had to meet so formally, after all those secret, febrile hours apart, when imagination, undaunted in the solitary watches of the night, had brought to both a sense of intimacy almost as vivid as actual experience. Now to shake hands again as mere acquaintances, to utter ordinary greetings, was like waking outside the closed portals of a place where one had passed ecstatic hours in dreams. For all he said was, "You see, I did come back!" And she, with lips tightened so that they might not tremble, "Just one day too late to ask me for a dance!"

"Everything seems the same," he murmured. With a kindling eye he looked round on the homely gewgaws of the hall, which once on a time had been material for his derision.

"The garden has changed," she answered; and through the French windows of the parlor he saw the last rose-petals falling in the rain.

"So it has, by George!"

From a near-by table, "Moloch's wife," the mountainous woman with the sprouting moles, stopped her gormandizing long enough to beam on them approvingly.

Again in Via Tornabuoni, they saw a shop-window filled with dominoes and masks, red, white, and green.

"A carnival ball!" exclaimed Reginald. "What luck! We'll have our dance together, after all!"

He went in to ask questions, paid for a box, bespoke a red domino. Returning to the pavement, they encountered the Ghillamoors. Thallie was presented to the black-haired woman of the Cherbourg tender.

Mrs. Ghillamoor was a handsome, graceful person just under thirty years, pale, showing some of that haggardness which comes to those who follow an unnatural regimen in order to keep thin. Her hat, her furs, her gown, the jewel at her neck, were unobtrusive even in their extreme modernity. Her whole manner proclaimed, by the perfection of its amiable restraint, that she had never known a time when she had not been a lady.

Thallie's spirits, a moment ago so high, sank to her heels. She told herself bitterly, "This is the sort of woman he's accustomed to!" She felt that in comparison with this perfected creature all her faults must be revealed to Reginald. In an agony of self-distrust, she wondered what she might say or do that disagreed with Mrs. Ghillamoor's pattern for behavior.

"You've been here long?" asked the latter in a softly modulated voice.

"I'm living here," Thallie replied. "I live quite near to where you're staying, in the Pension Schwandorf." Too late she caught herself up, blushed painfully. No doubt this overpowering stranger would consider that a plea for intimacy.

But Mrs. Ghillamoor did not notice her confusion. Sweetly smiling, she remarked:

"It seems to me that Reggie did n't half describe the charms of Florence in the winter-time."

Hector Ghillamoor, towering beside her in a belted overcoat, showed on his gladiator's face an enigmatical grin. He said to Reginald:

"Want a talk with you to-night."

"Make it seven o'clock," suggested Mrs. Ghillamoor. "And, for goodness' sake! Reggie, be on time for once!" As though from force of habit, she gave the young man a tap on the elbow with the back of her slim gloved hand, a sort of proprietary motion, half disparaging and half affectionate, that Thallie knew was meant for her to see. Next moment the married woman's eyes, good-humor disguising the inquisitiveness in their depths, slipped round to Thallie's face. And the friendliness of Mrs. Ghillamoor's good-by did not alter the young girl's conviction that her secret had been discovered by a trick, that in consequence the other was her antagonist.

So her first intuition, formed at Cherbourg, had been right: there was, or had been, something between Mrs. Ghillamoor and Reginald? Pleading a headache, Thallie escaped the remainder of her walk.

In result, Reginald managed to enter the Ghillamoors' parlor in the Hotel Alexandra at precisely seven o'clock.

By the fire, wrapped in a Roman shawl of knitted silk, sat a little girl of seven, scrawny, colorless, with black ringlets and large, serious eyes.

"*Wie geht's*, Rosalie," cried Reginald, in the hearty tone that young men assume for ailing children.

"*Wie geht's*, Uncle Reggie," the little girl replied, watching him closely, as if expecting him to play some

joke on her. "Your buttonhole looks lonely. Have a posy."

"Oh, thanks. And where are the paters and maters and potatoes, what?"

Without the shadow of a smile she answered:

"The paters and maters are dressing. The potatoes are cooking. That is, yours are. Little round bald ones to go with the *sôle Marguery*, and long brown hairy ones with the *filets mignons*."

"And what are your potatoes doing? Digesting?"

"I did n't get any," sighed the child. "I only had my darned old cereal."

Mrs. Ghillamoor entered the parlor in a saffron-colored evening gown, her hair freshly dressed, a cigarette between her fingers. By some process known only to herself and to her maid she had lost half a dozen years since afternoon.

The little invalid solemnly inspected her mother.

"Mama, your hair is different to-night. It's rather chic, I think. Is that the new frock from Poiret? Did you put it on to make poor Uncle Reggie lose an eye?"

"Poor Uncle Reggie has no eyes left to lose, my dear. Nurse is coming now to take your temperature and tuck you in. Let Uncle Reggie have a kiss — unless he's hoarding them these days."

Rosalie expelled her breath in a melancholy way.

"Here you are, then, Uncle Reggie. No, no; you know better than that! My forehead's for papa, my right cheek's for mama, my left cheek's for you."

"How about your lips?"

"You grown-up people all smoke, and tobacco makes my lips burn. Besides, that kind of kissing is n't sanitary. Is it, Nurse?"

The nurse, lifting her in the Roman shawl, bore her away. Mrs. Ghillamoor sat down beside the fire.

She was not, and had never been, in love with Reginald. To her mind, he could no more be compared to Hector Ghillamoor than if he had belonged to an inferior species. She had long since discovered many of his shortcomings, due, as she thought, to the fact that he, unlike her husband and herself, was the product of only a single affluent generation. She discerned beneath his polish, beneath the romanticism that underlay his worldly manner, a weakness on which no heavy strain had yet been put, a flaw that she would have described to Hector as a yellow streak.

But it was not necessary to be in love with him in order to feel jealousy. Mrs. Ghillamoor, though faithful to her husband, was not averse to the attentions of a *cavaliere servente* — a good-humored, presentable young man content to follow in her train and entertain her on demand. The traditional friend of the family, no matter how innocent his status, may sometimes find that a heart-affair arranged outside the long-frequented household affects the amiability of the wife.

As hail lashed the window-panes, she regarded Reginald with a mocking smile.

"A little of your famous Tuscan weather! By the way, we're leaving for Sicily to-morrow."

"To-morrow!"

"And none too soon for Rosalie, at that."

He flushed.

"Honestly, Paula, I thought Florence would be all right."

"Never mind. The doctors in Paris warned me. I had no intention of stopping here. Still, I did n't mind staying long enough to learn the reason for your eloquence. Now I think that the best thing for you, as well as for Rosalie, will be a month or two at Taormina."

His flush deepened. Shrugging his shoulders, he returned, with an attempt at nonchalance:

"Sorry, but that'll have to wait a bit. I can't possibly get off to-morrow."

Hector Ghillamoor lounged into the room, his big hands crammed in the pockets of his dinner-jacket, his chest already pushing the starched plastron out of his waistcoat. Mrs. Ghillamoor, with a hint of bitterness in her voice, informed him:

"Reggie is n't traveling in the morning."

"Nonsense!"

"It's so, old man. I've tied myself up for some sort of carnival ball."

"What a reason!" was Paula Ghillamoor's comment.

Her husband scowled.

"Bad business, Reggie. Go slow."

"Go slow at what?"

"Don't bluff. We have your number. You're stuck on her all right."

It was on the tip of Reginald's tongue to say, "Kindly mind your own business!" Yet by such a rejoinder he would affront two well-established dwellers in a world that he had not entered till in his teens—a world, indeed, wherein he still felt at times the fallibility of a novice. His respect for these patricians of three generations cowed his spirit. The timidity of the parvenu changed his defiance to a laugh.

"Oh, come, now," he remonstrated. "Hardly as bad as that!"

In Paula Ghillamoor's eyes the flash of triumph was immediately clouded by contempt. Though infatuated, Reginald evaded owning up to it. He was ashamed not of love, but of loving some one who was neither rich nor fashionable. In his effort to prove his worldly cultivation, his aristocratic tastes, he had even insulted his innamorata with a deprecatory smile. At last the yellow streak was showing.

Instantly Reginald Dux became less desirable even as a *cavaliere servente*.

Hector's valet bore in the cocktails.

"It's settled, however, that you won't start with us tomorrow?" asked Paula, casually.

"But how can I, since I've asked a lot of people to that wretched ball?"

Ghillamoor dubiously shook his head.

"Give me your word, at least, that as soon as our backs are turned you won't slop over. You know, if you did, there'd be the very devil to pay at home. Why, your mother would probably hold Paula and me responsible!"

"My dear fellow!" Reginald protested, still with his deprecating smile.

A waiter, bowing in the doorway, announced that dinner was served. At once Mrs. Ghillamoor swept her saffron-colored skirt into the adjoining room.

Next morning, John Holland, leaving the Hotel Alexandra for the Archæological Museum, saw Reginald bidding the voyagers good-by. The historian's thoughts did not return to the black jars of South Etruria until he found himself inside the museum door, before the venerable statue of the Chimera.

When Thallie learned that Reginald had renounced the Ghillamoors in order to stay in Florence, a flood of triumph washed away all her chagrin.

The carnival ball was imminent. In the Pension Schwandorf there was a merry trying-on of dominoes and masks, a running to and fro of dressmakers' apprentices. It was arranged that on the festive night all should meet at the pension at half-past ten o'clock. The ball was to be held in the opera-house, the Politeama Fiorentino, only a square away, so carriages would not be needed unless it rained. The Magenta Cavalry prayed fervently for clear weather.

Their plea was granted.

As the hour approached, Thallie, standing at the window of her bedroom, imbibed the balmiest air that she had ever known in winter. It seemed to her that spring must have returned for this occasion, with all that spring may mean. Looking up at the starry sky, she found the splendor of the world, enhanced by the tenor of her present thoughts, almost too much to bear. With a sigh of rapture she turned to the looking-glass. She knew that she was beautiful tonight. She saw in her reflection a new alluring quality. Her fresh loveliness seemed more humanly provocative than previously. Perhaps this was due in part to her attire, of white satin trimmed with tiny rosebuds, contrived in the very latest fashion known to Florence, the finest, most sophisticated dress that she had ever worn.

CHAPTER TWELVE

AN OLD GATE-KEEPER IN A RÔLE OF GREAT IMPORTANCE

AT eleven o'clock the Goodchilds, Reginald, and the three lieutenants set out afoot for the Polite-ama Fiorentino. Thallie's domino and mask were white; Frossie wore green; Aurelius, in order not to put a quietus on the merrymaking, had muffled himself in a robe of red glazed muslin. But Reginald, observing that the officers disdained to hide their uniforms and faces with such frippery, blushed for his lack of savoir-faire, and left his carnival regalia in the pension.

Thallie found him overwhelming in full evening dress.

Approaching the opera-house, they found a crowd of poor Florentines watching the participants arrive. Vehicles crawled forward in a line; cab-doors kept slamming; between banks of heads, that wore an unearthly pallor in the rays of arc-lamps, a stream of dominoes, red, white, and green, ascended to the doorways. Thallie was nearly crushed by a luxurious motor-car, at the wheel of which Reginald noted Baron di Campoformio's chauffeur.

In the foyer, one mob besieged the cloak-rooms on the left, another, largely composed of rakish-looking fellows in false noses, seethed round the buffets extending to the right. Straight ahead, a third swarm was climbing a staircase to the ballroom. The Americans and the Magenta Cavalry drove upward through this press and gained their box.

Within a great ring of boxes the dancing-floor disappeared beneath promenaders in eccentric costume. A film of dust, produced by these innumerable feet, dimmed the glitter of the military band that filled the stage, befogged the clustered lights and tricolor decorations, gave to the balconies overhead, where small, grotesque figures chased one another amid showers of confetti, a look of unreality.

In the adjoining box Thallie and Frossie were surprised to see "Moloch's wife," from Giacinta's tea-room. The lieutenants, bowing to her, introduced the Goodchilds.

She was Princess Tchernitza!

The band burst into a triumphal march; the promenaders scampered in all directions, and there emerged upon the floor a procession of nautch-girls, demons, harlequins, giants with the heads of beasts, among whom, on an artificial camel, rode a woman clad in gauze and rhinestones. The crowd made obeisance. Ribbons of colored paper curled through the air. Amid frenzied applause a Roman general, his classic costume enhanced by spectacles and flowing whiskers, scaled the camel, embraced the Spirit of the Carnival. Mr. Goodchild gave a jump. The victim of this onslaught was the International Star!

"The Tesore!" Azeglio ejaculated. And to Fava, with a mischievous smile, "To-night would be an excellent time to present papa!"

Camillo quelled him with a look.

Thallie, standing at the box-rail, clapped her hands delightedly. To see better she removed her mask. Immediately a group of men gathered on the floor below—clowns, Fiji islanders, brigands, Arabs, mandarins. Sounds of approval rose; a few of the masqueraders ventured florid compliments, and a little thin fellow, in evening dress, but wearing a pig's head of papier-mâché, made a motion as if of yearning to clasp her to his breast. Lieutenant Fava

dashed a glass of champagne into the stranger's eyes. As the latter slunk away to mop his coat, Aurelius let slip an exclamation of distress. Reginald, however, felt irritation because it was not he who had avenged that insolence.

"Keep your mask on," Camillo Olivuzzi whispered in Thallie's ear.

"I see one has to," she agreed, refastening the elastics with unsteady fingers.

"But naturally," said Fava, "when one has a smile to make the lights seem dim!"

And presently they observed that Princess Tchernitza also had clapped on a mask, bright green to match her gown, and large enough to conceal at least the center of her visage. Through this disguise she fixed her eyes on Mr. Goodchild.

"Well, sir," she demanded of him in her bassoon-like voice.

"I find it stupendous, ma'am. It's like a — kaleidoscope!"

"A kaleido — Ah, to be sure — a *caleidoscopio*, though considerably larger."

"The endless repetition of red, white, and green!"

"Yes, fortunately the regulations permitted a green dress, or I should not have come. I wear only green, purple, and gold, for those are the colors harmonizing with my personality. Before I knew better, I affected gray, and misfortunes heaped themselves upon me. Gray brought me poverty, just as the habitual use of crimson would cause me sooner or later to commit a crime of passion."

"Good heavens, ma'am!"

"Oh, these are established facts. Anybody who ignores them risks a cataclysm. But all are not affected by these colors in the same way. For example, tell me your full name and date of birth."

Receiving his answer, the Bulgarian made a mental calculation.

"The numerical potency of 'Aurelius Goodchild' in relation to this nativity is unfortunate. You must change your name."

"But it seems a little late —"

"Then you must take a secret name, propitious for you, and always identify yourself with it. Let me think. Ha! You could not do better than to call yourself, in your subconscious mind, Augustus Autocrator, after the Egyptian title of the first Roman emperor, of whom, by the way, a friend of mine happens to be the reincarnation. And you must remember never to wear brown or lavender! Brown would bring you duels, while lavender would produce an appetite insatiable for liquor. In addition to all this, you must be sure to vibrate in the key of G-flat!"

Leaning across the partition of the box, oblivious of the racket from the dancing-floor, Princess Tchernitza went on to describe at length the science of numbers and colors as developed by the Florentine theosophists. Her obesity made her curiously imposing; her deep voice issued from behind the mask like the utterance of a pythoness from the curtains of a sanctuary, and in the uproar of the carnival her statements seemed like the rigmaroles of an oracle heard in the ancient mysteries. Aurelius, who always swallowed such ideas at a gulp, could hardly deny a feeling that this meeting was predestined, that this monstrous personage had been sent by Providence to show him how to end the incoherencies of his existence. Tense in his robe of red muslin, with shivers running down his spine, he no longer scanned the crowd for that unappreciated comic genius, Nella Tesore, the International Star.

The maskers cavorted on the floor, here jiggging in clusters, there skipping in long strings, or forming an eddy

round some acrobat who whirled his partner off her feet. "Look!" cried Azeglio, pointing toward the far curve of the boxes. "Campoformio!" But the others could not discern the baron through that brilliant haze.

"No matter; he will come over when he catches sight of us," Camillo told Frossie. "At last you shall see the good fellow who is helping me to win my military brevet."

"I wish he did n't exist," said Frossie.

"But all my efforts toward advancement are on your account."

"I want no honors that you have to risk your life for," she answered. And pressing his hand, she turned her masked face away.

From below, some dapper officers, anxious to be invited to the box, made gestures to the three lieutenants. Azeglio and Fava motioned them to be off.

"We were right, I hope, Monsieur," Lieutenant Fava asked Reginald, with a smile that seemed to cover a subtle bitterness.

"Perfectly, Monsieur," the other replied, concealing his chagrin. From the first these wretched soldiers had behaved as if the box was theirs! To retrieve his self-respect, Reginald ordered more champagne.

Thallie, with a glance at her father, consented to take another sip—"just a thimbleful." Like most ardent persons who find themselves amid unusual excitement, she began to feel her inhibitions weakening, as if the atmosphere around her were a vast, insidious solvent, replete as it was with fluttering hues and swimming lights, pulsating with melody and laughter, informed with the emanations of a thousand reckless minds. She threw open her domino, which stifled her as if it had been the encumbrance of old humdrum, prudent teachings: and her young form, emerging from that shapeless chrysalis, was charming in the new sophistica-

tion of its garniture. Reginald stared at Thallie's throat, milk-white, encircled by the double crease.

"How about that dance?"

Fava objected. "A lady could not go on the floor with all those rascals." His protest dwindled to a curse as Reginald and Thallie slipped out of the box.

In the corridor an odalisk jingled by, an Apache in pursuit. Two masks were squeaking at each other in the disguised falsetto customary at Italian carnivals. A Turk appeared, walking on his hands, followed by shouting friends. Thallie and Reginald, dodging past these zanies, reached the dancing-floor.

The band was playing "Smile of April." Reginald put his arm round Thallie. A shiver passed through her, similar to that which she had felt at her first swallow of champagne, and she closed her eyes as they glided into a waltz.

The revolving couples engulfed them: they floated through a sea of languorous humanity. A confused fragrance was exhaled from these innumerable corsages, bouquets, and coiffures. From all sides came unsteady bursts of mirth, stifled protestations, murmurs that blended with the softness of the flutes. Here and there, on a countenance from which both the satin and the natural shield had been withdrawn, was visible a look that may have been the epitome of Reginald's and Thallie's own sensations. She, gazing up at him, felt all the sentimental instincts of her life fuse into an immense desire to show her gratitude to this splendid lover. He, glancing down at her, was more deeply stirred by the concealing mask than if he had seen her face.

The music stopped, but still there passed through their temples the rhythm of the waltz, still there coursed through their veins the stimulation of that dance performed so exquisitely in accord, as though these two beings had been

commanded by a single impulse. Then they saw far off, through the illusive mist of lights and dust, the box occupied by Mr. Goodchild, Frossie, and the three lieutenants. And that spot was for both of them a dwindled, vague reminder of everything prosaic, to which the expanded heart could not return so soon.

A flight of steps near by ascended to the balconies. The white balustrades, entangled with confetti, resembled the approaches to the submarine palace of an Eastern legend, fashioned of nacre, festooned with such vivid weeds as lie beneath enchanted seas. Thallie and Reginald ran up the stairs like truants from the actual world.

On a landing, in a pillared embrasure which no one else had yet discovered, they found an open window. A mild breeze caressed them, rich with the perfume of this almost vernal night. Thallie lifted the ruffle of her mask. In the starlight her mouth was like a crimson flower.

"How delicious the air is!" she breathed. "It blows from the park. The Cascine is only a block away from here."

"A queer night," he answered in unsteady tones; for he knew that to-night he was at the first real crisis of his life.

Long ago, in those summer days when he had rediscovered her in Florence, he had been like one who, for lack of livelier occupation, takes out a skiff upon a tranquil little stream. Condescendingly he had drifted between banks of unpretentious verdure, which formed a prospect quite unlike the scenes that his romanticism craved — broad waters which reflected mountain-peaks transfigured by the after-glow, which mirrored, beneath the fading shore, a carved marble terrace surrounded by *Olea fragrans* trees. But, as he went on floating down the stream, he had come to perceive in this naïve retreat a charm not furnished by the landscapes of his dreams. He had said to himself, "There,

round that turn ahead, is surely a still prettier view; I can't turn back until I've seen it." Seeing it, he had mused. "Some men would be content to live in such a place." And, as he drifted on, new thoughts, as simple as his surroundings, arrayed themselves against his old, precociously extravagant ideals. Then for a while he had buried in his heart the fact that such scenes as these could please him, as if there were something shameful in appreciating unelaborated beauty. But new vistas kept opening before him, all winsome, all refreshing, as idyllic as a panorama of unspoiled young love. Presently, he no longer reflected, with a smile, "At least this spot would do for the amusement of a day." Instead, with ardor almost triumphant over snobbishness, he wondered, "Even for a lifetime I might be happiest here?" And finally, when he heard from far upstream a faint outcry bidding him return, had he not drifted too far, had not the current grown too strong for him to make that long pull back?

To-night all his hesitation had evaporated in this spring-like air, in this embrasure where a bacchanalian uproar melted into the silence of the stars.

Many a youth, at the height of his infatuation, is not as he was yesterday or as he will be to-morrow. Romance, choosing the moment of unique seductiveness, has whirled him up on flaming wings to regions of unexampled devotion and nobility. Then, indeed, the least worthy lover may become the person that his girl imagines him to be, raised far above all cowardice, all calculation, all his normal flaws. So Reginald, unconscious at last of every thought but this, that the time had come when he must say to her, "Yes, marry me, for I cannot live without you!"

But how could he say that here, in this place where every minute they risked some ribald interruption?

The sweet breeze was still blowing from the park, only a

block away. He saw on the opposite footpath, beyond a line of waiting vehicles, a man staring up at the window. It was Baron di Campoformio's chauffeur.

Reginald leaned across the sill.

"Antonio!"

The chauffeur, removing his cap, showed his teeth in a grin of recognition.

"Can you give me half an hour?"

The fellow shrugged uncertainly. Reginald twisted a bank-note round some silver. The packet clinked on the footpath.

The chauffeur ran to crank Campoformio's car.

"Think, Thallie, on a night like this just you and I and the Cascine!"

"Out there!"

"No one need see us. But when we come back perhaps we'll let them know."

She thought, "He means that when we come back we'll be engaged!" She lowered her head, her throat pulsing, her body thrilling, in its shimmering new frock, with the emotions that her mask concealed. Then with a resolute movement she pulled the hood of her domino over her bright curls. Breathless, she said, "All right." And it was Thallie, not Reginald, who led the way.

As they hastened through a corridor behind the balcony, the carnival rout again enveloped them. These scampering figures, bizarre and ravishing, these dust-adulterated scents of musk and roses, these sounds of kisses snatched in corners amid scufflings and squeals, distorted like the fumes of a too-dangerous wine the inspiration that one had caught back there from the immaculate stars. Thallie clung fast to Reginald's arm, as if, assailed from every side by a half-comprehended menace, she knew no refuge so safe as the beloved. He, when he felt her warm and yielding pres-

sure, quickened his pace with a swift access of virility. "By George!" he thought, "let one of these monkeys so much as look at her, and I'll knock his head clear off!"

A wide staircase fell away before them, choked with masqueraders. Setting his shoulder to the crowd, he dragged her down the steps. In this press, which gave out a heat of many glowing bodies, the smell of alcohol, sachets, tobacco, and moist flesh was as enervating as the steam of Circe's caldron. A tipsy Greek warrior suspected the charms concealed by Thallie's domino, and risked an amorous whisper. Though she blushed to her forehead, she made no sign of protest, for fear that a brawl might keep them from the park.

At the foot of the staircase she saw the thin little man in the pig's head of papier-mâché, his shirt-bosom stained with the champagne that Fava had thrown over him. Flattened beside the entrance to the foyer, indifferent to the jostling of the mob, he looked at her steadily through his bestial disguise. Now, however, she found him more uncanny than absurd, a sort of symbol posted at the door, a figure, with its brutish head-gear and its foppish evening dress befouled with wine, that seemed to propose an almost sinister riddle.

But Reginald drew her eagerly into the foyer, where Campoformio's chauffeur was waiting for them.

The motor-car stood thrumming at the curb. Half a dozen shabby idlers sprang forward to hold the door. The interior of the limousine was revealed, upholstered with plum-colored cloth, a yellow plush rug trailing over the tufted cushions, some silver objects gleaming in a rack between the doors. This limousine, once the equipage of the American Baroness di Campoformio, still had the appearance of a dainty little boudoir.

Thallie, her foot already on the step, drew back. The

motor-car did not look at all as she had thought it would. And in a flash her intuition told her that this tête-à-tête with Reginald was also liable to exceed her expectations.

"Hurry up!" he urged, his hand insistent on her arm.

"No! no! A stranger's automobile —"

"I tell you he's a friend of mine. I've stayed at his house. It's Campofornio, that I stopped with out by Quarto."

"Then — then — go ask him. Let's go back and ask him if he minds —"

"What nonsense!"

She saw the indignation in his face, quailed, became limp. His hands — or was it terror lest he might hate her otherwise? — drove Thallie forward. She huddled into the farthest corner of the limousine. The plum-colored upholstery dispelled an odor of stale cigarette-smoke which recalled to her the studio in Via de' Bardi.

The door slammed shut. At the lowered window appeared the chauffeur's broad face.

"The Cascine!"

"The Cascine? Ah, Signorino, but the Cascine would be closed."

"Impossible! I mean Cascine Park."

"Yes, Signorino, Cascine Park. The gates are shut at night."

Thallie expelled a long breath. But Reginald cried:

"Drive there, anyway! I'll find out for myself."

The chauffeur took his seat. The vagabonds, having received no tips, raised an ironical cheer. The automobile rushed off toward the park. Street lights, sailing by, flashed over the two figures rigid from suspense.

On each side the house-fronts fell away; the avenue expanded into a square; ahead loomed the tall stone towers of the Cascine gate. The motor-car glided to a standstill

the rays of its lamps, illumining a distant mass of ilex-leaves, were strained through iron bars.

"Behold, Signorino!" the chauffeur exclaimed, with a triumphant gesture.

Thallie leaned toward Reginald imploringly.

"You see, it's really closed."

"You seem far from sorry!"

"Please don't be angry with me."

"So," he muttered, "I was mistaken in your wishes."

"Ah, if you could understand!"

"Then, if the gates had been open?"

"Yes," she assented, with a febrile eagerness. "Yes, if the gates had been open; but they're not."

"We'll take another drive. In ten minutes we can reach San Miniato."

In a stifled voice she protested:

"San Miniato is n't the Cascine. To-morrow we'll come here. To-morrow afternoon—"

"No doubt!"

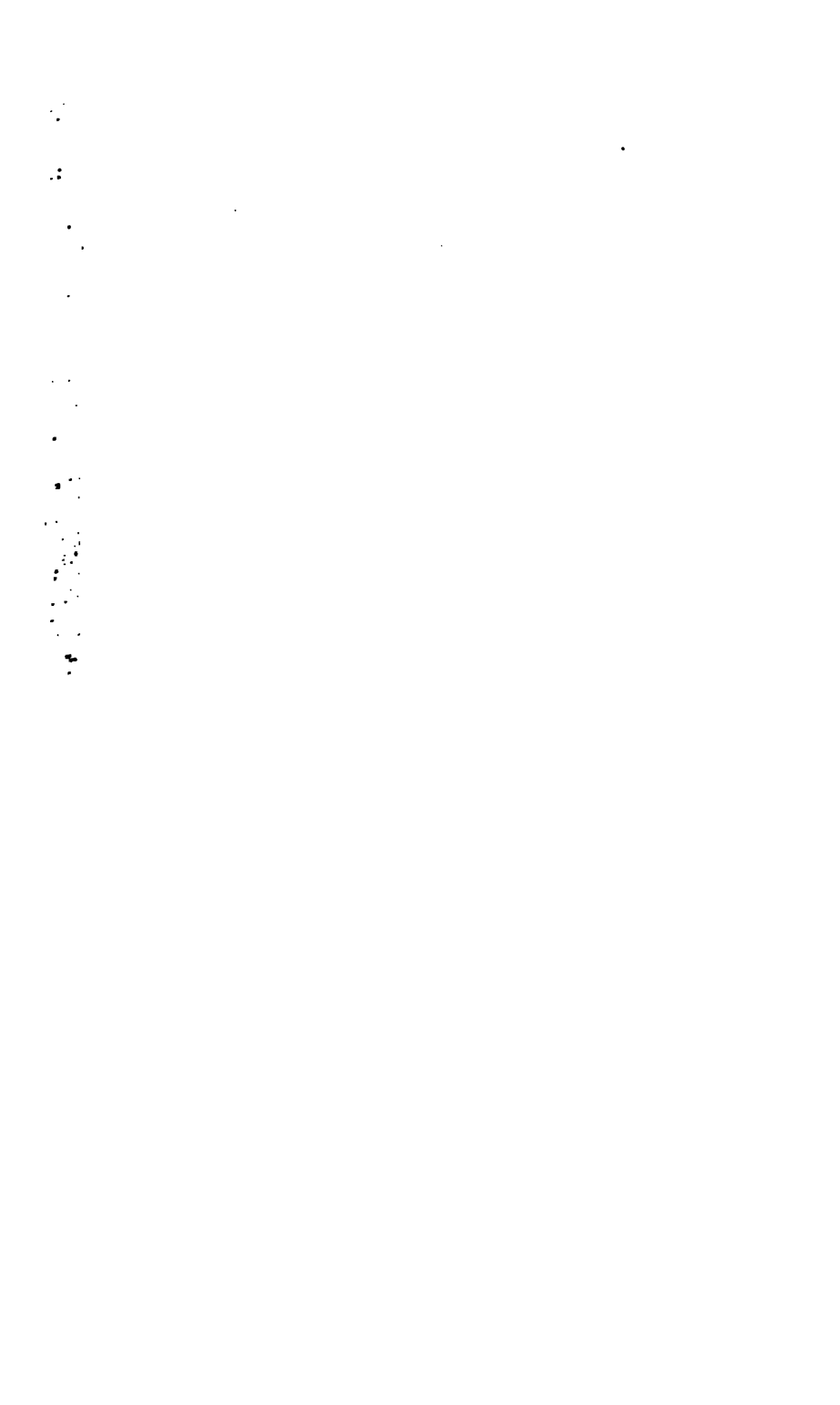
And to mock him still more there issued from the park, through the iron bars that reached across his path, the breeze, sweet with dewy leaves and moss, that seemed to blow from regions of eternal spring.

He had opened his mouth to order, "Drive us back," when he saw a figure approaching through the shadows.

Into the glare of the lamps there shambled a senile wreck whose military cap was decked with tattered braid, whose red-rimmed eyes were surrounded with wrinkles like old sword-cuts, whose nose resembled a potato, whose ragged white mustaches concealed his chin. This creature, advancing with assurance, peered into the limousine. When he caught sight of Thallie's shimmering dress and satin mask, the vacuity of his countenance gave place to such a grimace as a ghost might show while contemplating the



"Impossible to-night, my little prince. The park is shut."



follies that enamored him when he was flesh and blood.

"*L'Hascine è chius*," he croaked. "The park is shut."

"Who's this?" demanded Reginald of the chauffeur.

"The gate-keeper, Signorino."

"He has the keys?"

"No! no!" pleaded Thallie, then shrank into the corner.

The chauffeur inquired:

"Hast thou the keys, old one?"

His grimace maliciously expanding, the wraith repeated to Reginald, in the roughest dialect of Florence:

"Impossible to-night, my little prince. The park is shut."

But Reginald produced a fifty-lire note.

The ancient, who had seemed, a moment since, beyond desire of every sort, now showed in his filmy eyes a gleam of cupidity. Yet he only wavered, shaking his head, groaning excuses, mumbling of the danger he would run, until a second bank-note had been added to the first. Then, with a last despairing oath that he was ruined, he snatched the money and hobbled to the bars.

"Make haste!" called the old voice, quickened by greed and fear. "Make haste! Make haste!"

The motor-car, springing through the gateway, was engulfed by the Cascine.

Its windows blank, its panels faintly glistening in the starlight, the limousine pursued a radiant path, as elusive as that which leads to happiness in dreams. Ahead, the nocturnal landscape kept leaping forth in unnatural hues and extraordinary forms; but that foliage, just as the car attained it, faded into obscurity again. And behind, the darkness, swimming together, blotted everything, as if the phantasmal mingling of leaf and light had been a visionary's paradise, which ceases to exist when one attempts to penetrate its borders.

After the motor-car had passed by, a vast silence again descended from the heavens and enwrapped the park.

But between the deep meadows bathed in mist, beside groves that had their filmy tops entangled with the stars, the shaft of lamp-light still chased the soft obscurity, the closed windows of the limousine still vibrated in the night-wind that was sweeter than the kiss of Aphrodite.

And that progress was noted by other eyes than those of the impelling universe. Here and there, amid denuded thickets pale with statues, from marble benches encircled by the graves of last year's flowers, rose the heads of those who had been able to evade without a bribe the old gate-keeper's barrier against nature. A white-haired, ruminant priest, who could not sleep at home, reflected, with the worldly wisdom gained from many confessionals, "In that automobile are two persons, both of whom may some day repent this hour, but one of whom will never quite regret it?" Farther on, a poor young poet, who lived for the most part on dreams of art and of love, murmured sadly, "She who rides with him in such an equipage must be very beautiful, or at least must be beautified by elegance and the occasion. Yet I doubt if he who rides with her has soul enough to immortalize this moment even with a couplet. Alas! if only I were he!" And, near the far end of the park, a cowherd from the Cascine stables said to his sweetheart, with a hoarse laugh: "Like us two, eh? But for all their fine little house on wheels no happier to-night than you and I!"

Perhaps not so happy.

The motor-car was returning. From the Piazzale del Re, where the trees fell away in a wide circle, one could already see the street-lamps twinkling beyond the gates. The wheels revolved more slowly. The chauffeur, half turning in his seat, called out:

"Signorino, maybe I still have time for one more turn around the park?"

The window dropped open with a bang.

"No, drive to the Pension Schwandorf."

In five minutes they were there.

The young man, stepping out upon the footpath, attempted to help her from the limousine. She avoided his hand. Her domino floated loose; her face, at last unmasked, gleamed through the shadows like alabaster as she ran up the steps. The door burst open; the white vestibule received her. The door slammed shut, fell ajar from that impact, once more revealed her fluttering domino, which quickly diminished in the depths of the dim hall. His hand still raised, he stared toward the spot where she had last been visible.

Finally he reëntered the limousine.

"To the opera-house, Signorino?"

"Eh? Why, yes, I suppose so."

As the chauffeur was about to start, Reginald began to fumble with more money.

"Remember, Antonio —"

The Italian, with a look of reproach, laid one hand dramatically upon his breast.

"Ah, Signorino," he protested. And when he had stuffed this second fee into his pocket, the faithful Antonio drove back in dashing style to the Politeama Fiorentino.

Now the whole edifice seemed trembling with excitement. Wild laughter and blares of music, the sound of popping corks and smashing glass, merged with a steady roar that issued from the auditorium above a torrent of helmets, garlands, peaked hats, disheveled wigs, and pinchbeck crowns. For an instant Reginald was amazed to find these revels not only still in progress, but more violent than ever. It

seemed to him that all this license ought to be spent by now, and superseded by remorse. He felt as alien here as a young Daniel moving through Babylonian orgies.

A girl in the conventional dress of Cleopatra, her gauzy skirts in ribbons, her vulture head-dress awry, barred his way, laid her henna-stained fingers on his shoulder, demanded half indignantly: "Come, now! For me, at least, you will smile?" He pushed by her with a hostile glare. The laughter of the crowd pursued him down a corridor. The door of the box was before him. Recoiling, turning on his heel, he hastened toward the street.

But that would be the act of a fool! It was necessary to go back there to the box, rejoin the people of whom he was still the host, offer some story. "See here, in Heaven's name, a little common sense!"

After a while he was able to retrace his steps.

Mr. Goodchild, in his robe of red glazed muslin, still sat in the shadow of the obese Bulgarian. Camillo and Frossie, unaware of everything except each other, were whispering together. Azeglio and Fava stood languidly tossing confetti at the dancers. Here nothing was changed.

"Where's Thallie?"

He answered:

"You see, I'd have been here much sooner, but I met some friends. Campoformio—"

"Campoformio was here just now with Mr. Holland."

"Of course. To be sure. So he told me. But before that. One after the other! Or else I'd have been here instantly."

"Is Thallie with Mr. Holland, then?"

"No: the fact is, she did n't feel well. She asked me to take her home. You see, I'd have been here much sooner—"

Mr. Goodchild, turning pale, asked quickly:

A RÔLE OF IMPORTANCE

"What ails her? What is the matter with my daughter?"

Reginald wanted to vault the box-rail and conceal himself among the dancers. Putting on the wretched imitation of a smile, he managed to get out the words:

"The heat and noise —"

"What a pity, Monsieur," said Fava, with a homicidal look, "that you did n't take my advice!"

But Mr. Goodchild's hands were trembling on his knees.

"Young sir, it is not necessary to break bad news to me so slowly."

"Really, on my word of honor, it's only a touch of vertigo."

"Vertigo!" cried the father, leaping to his feet. "That might be the beginning of anything!"

"No! no! She asked me particularly to tell you it was nothing. She'd rather you did n't bother. In fact, she wants to be alone."

"Because she does n't want to spoil our pleasure," Frossie retorted, rising. "Come, Dad."

"It may be the beginning of cholera," gasped Aurel, frozen with horror, staring wildly at them all.

Azeglio burst out laughing.

"Calm yourself, Signore. This year there is no cholera anywhere in Italy."

And Reginald, his shoulders bent in unaccustomed lines, continued to stutter:

"I tell you it's nothing, absolutely nothing. She won't thank you, you know! A headache! The noise and heat —"

Nevertheless, Frossie was already in the doorway. The Magenta Cavalry, with the resignation of good soldiers to the unexpected, were putting on their pearl-gray capes. Mr. Goodchild was trying to withdraw his fingers.

from Princess Tchernitza's hand, as fat as a pin-cushion, blazing with sapphires and emeralds too gorgeous to be real.

"My daughter, ma'am! Pardon me, but my daughter's been taken ill! We don't know yet what it is. We think it's not cholera —"

"Cholera! Bah! One moment. My day at home is Tuesday. Drop in, and I'll finish telling you about the astral colors."

"Yes, yes! The astral colors! I implore you, ma'am! My daughter!"

"Bring her along. You'll meet a friend of mine who does crystal-gazing, a very clairvoyant person. Tuesday, and don't forget, because I feel somehow that you and I are kindred spirits, that we have met elsewhere, if not in a previous existence, at least on the Ripa-banks of Devachân —"

But Aurelius, forgetting his manners for the first time in his life, had rushed into the corridor.

In the street, all scuffling along between a walk and a dog-trot, they passed Campoformio's chauffeur, who doffed his cap respectfully.

Aurelius and Frossie darted into the pension. The lieutenants lighted Toscano cigars and set out for the cavalry barracks. Reginald returned to his hotel.

He locked his bedroom door. He paced the floor. From time to time he stopped before a looking-glass, stared at his face, exclaimed in the tones of one newly roused from intoxication, "What, is it you?"

The stimulations of the evening were dispelled. Even the charm of all these weeks had been dissolved. The pinions of romance, after lifting him high above himself, had shriveled, at the contact of reality, and let him drop to earth. On each side, indeed, there had been disillusion

and revulsion so intense that his past expectations of felicity now appeared insane. He saw between himself and Thallie an abyss which had opened in one moment like the fissure of an earthquake, which he took for a gulf eternally impassable.

"No, we were never meant for each other. I must have been crazy to think so. What's more, she knows it now as well as I." And as though she were there before him, he cried accusingly, "You do know it, you ought to have known it from the first, as well as I!" And soon: "They were right, the Ghillamoors. Good Lord! if I'd taken their advice! Or if I were back where I stood before I ever met her!"

Presently the old fancies, that had often come to him before his journey into Italy, returned, in poignant contrast with the mockery of this night. Somewhere, amid the darkness, perhaps in the direction of Lake Como, she existed in the flesh — the sumptuous mistress of his previous ideals, whose image had been dimmed by this blundering infatuation? And at last a delicious relief pervaded his despondency, with the thought that life might hold out opportunities as tempting as before.

"When we're in wrong, we owe it to ourselves to struggle out." Though he repeated that aloud, he still heard the voice of conscience, whispering of mankind's traditional obligations. Soon, however, lifting his head defiantly, "But she told me with her own lips that she felt she could never lay eyes on me again." And this speech of hers, the true causes of which he did not know enough to fathom, became for him the *open sesame* to liberty.

Next morning, while Florence was still dim, Reginald and his baggage left the Hotel Alexandra. John Holland, glancing down from a window, saw him drive away. For some time the historian's keen gray eyes remained fixed on

the summit of Mont' Oliveto, growing the graver as the illumination of the sunrise spread.

At the railroad station Reginald caught a train for Naples. As the engine was puffing out of Florence:

"After all, decency demands that I send some plausible excuse from Naples — a death or something. A sort of loophole. For if I should want to come back —"

But he knew in his heart that he would not come back.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

JOHN HOLLAND BRINGS HIS WORK IN FLORENCE
TO A CLOSE

THALLIE managed to persuade her father and Frossie that she had not been taken down with cholera. Mr. Goodchild decided that this prostration had resulted from the carnival ball: always highly strung, she was suffering from those too-violent vibrations that had filled the opera-house. Frossie, however, was less easily relieved. Watching the still face averted on the pillow, she suspected a condition worse, in her judgment, than physical illness — a lovers' quarrel, the jeopardy of Thallie's dearest hopes, perhaps an irreparable break with Reginald Dux.

But even next morning Thallie made no confession.

That day it was necessary to act as usual, to speak in ordinary tones, to make a pretense of eating in the red dining-room, where it seemed that the eyes of all the pension were boring through her back. Mme. von Schwandorf brought her yellow frizzes and dangling laces to the Goodchilds' table.

"What ails my precious Thallie?"

"The ball last night was too much for her."

"Then she must take a nice nap."

Ah, if it had needed only that!

Bedtime came round at last, and Reginald had made no sign. The dread of seeing him gave place to fear lest he might not appear to-morrow.

Late the following afternoon, while Frossie and Mr. Goodchild were out walking, Thallie intrusted to the little door-porter, Domenico, a note:

Come and forgive me for the words I did n't mean.

Domenico brushed his boots anew, polished the tiny brass keys on the collar of his gray frock-coat, saw to it that his linen was quite clean — for the door-porter of the Pension Schwandorf ought to look his best before the porter of the big Hotel Alexandra. Then he trotted away toward the Arno, delicately holding between two fingers the missive of the *carina*, the *simpatica*, the *bellissima* Signorina Thallie. And presently he trotted back, into the house, up-stairs to the dear Signorina Thallie's bedroom door, which she, having seen him cross the street, was holding open. But the note that he presented was her own!

"He is not there, Signorina. He departed yesterday with all his baggages. He is entirely gone away, to Sicily, or something like that."

Closing the door, staring and open-mouthed, she leaned her weight against the panels, as if trying to keep out this news.

"No! no! it's impossible! It's too hideous to be true!"

Frossie, returning, found her in hysterics and learned the truth. And that same night Frossie, almost as much shaken as if this catastrophe had been her own, was forced to tell Mr. Goodchild that Reginald and Thallie, after a misunderstanding, had parted perhaps forever.

In the days that followed, Thallie, without the wish to live or the energy to die, said many a time to herself and to her sister, "He has broken my heart." But as time passed, she found that one may survive even such an injury, though the broken heart that has been healed does not for a long while absorb its scars.

However, her convalescence was not slow, considering that before it was completed she seemed to have been made over into another person. Her intellect, formerly restricted by the optimism of good health, saw the whole spread of life in a new light when her vitality was lowered by despair. She came to know the pessimism of youth whose vigor has been exhausted by its tragedies, an immature cynicism than which there is none more bitter, more greedy for confirmation of its melancholy fancies. Listless on her long-chair covered with monkeys and pomegranates, beside the warm stove of yellow glazed tiles, she re-read the novelists whose dreary views had once repelled her. But now, at some passage meant to show the cruelty and worthlessness of life, she felt a pang of pain and satisfaction mingled, as who should say: "That is true; I have found existence like that." Or else: "All these vows of love, what irony! In the last chapter we shall see that they were lies; otherwise this writer does n't deserve his reputation."

When she began to go about again, one now and then surprised on her face the look that she might wear at forty. For her beauty was altered, too, like a garden of roses the details of which, hitherto lost in sunshine, grow cold and clear beneath the first gray sky of autumn.

She now preferred to take her walks alone. In those dismal days of March she revisited the spots where he and she had laughed together, at each return aware of a twinge in which misery was fraught with the strange pleasure of a martyr. She contemplated such places with the melancholy of one who reviews the regions where he was happy in his childhood. And somehow, whenever she had refreshed her memory in those surroundings, she could think of Reginald more kindly, as if he who had laughed with her there were a different person from the Reginald that had been.

Perhaps that was why she

At nightfall she regained the pension, enervated by her thoughts and the Italian winds, pale, with deep shadows beneath her eyes, her rich-hued tresses showing a diminished luster. But next morning, moved by a nervous restlessness, she set out again to hug her anguishes and apprehensions in the solitude of crowds, to sweep the picture-galleries with an unseeing gaze, to sit brooding in empty churches, to lean over the parapet of a bridge, watch the swift current, and reflect with a shudder in which two fears were blended. "It might even come to that?" But presently she was able to stop thinking of the river.

Yet she felt that to go on living it was necessary to find some anodyne for life. She remembered her old dreams of art, put up her easel, for hours sat staring at an empty canvas. Finding the very thought of legitimate, sound work too great a tax upon her brain, she wondered if she could not resume her painting with pictures in the Post-Impressionist style? But her mind was unable to direct her "even to the execution of a Post-Impressionist picture!" All her talents seemed to have evaporated with her happiness; her hopes of artistic fame were shattered, like her confidence in love.

So she resumed her listless wandering about the city, weighed down the more by inability to divert her mind with work.

Sometimes, while returning to the pension in the dusk, she was overtaken by John Holland.

Nowadays, if joined by another man, she would have walked faster in order to be rid of him the sooner. But with Mr. Holland she felt, instead of repugnance and suspicion, an instinctive respect, a confidence peculiarly soothing to her nerves.

He failed to ask her why she looked so blue; he did not seem to notice anything extraordinary in her new behavior;

JOHN HOLLAND'S WORK

he refrained from objecting to her involuntary, pessimistic comments. Yet when their walk was ended, she felt the moment less despondent, and at the pension door good-by almost with regret. For there are some personalities which so generously radiate strength and calmness words are scarcely necessary for the relief of distraught souls with whom they come in contact.

All the same, Thallie Goodchild did not find John Holland taciturn. A chance word reminded him of some anecdote which he related with an artistry so subtle that one realized the charm, but not the means by which it was produced. And now she discovered that the tall historian, of world fame, forty years, and apparent gravity she had always been in awe, possessed a store of humor, not heartlessly satirical like the wit of youth to which Reginald had treated her, mellowed by a sympathetic comprehension of the world. In short, she began to perceive that Mr. Holland was not amused by many persons, yet found none of them ridiculous. And presently, in spite of her sadness and her new, sad thoughts about humanity, she found herself laughing at the absurd behavior of the actors in his tales from life, laughing as gently as if at the antics of children, who will some day, here or hereafter, gain maturity.

Then, having laughed, she usually felt a qualm, such as comes to one who has been inveigled into merriment and is still clad in mourning-weeds.

Was it possible, she wondered, that her lacerated heart retained a capacity for pleasure?

At least not here, she thought. And once again the Italian spring is already faintly suggested in the March — Thallie felt the stirring of a vernal restlessness, an impulse to travel far from these scenes full of sweet memories, which nevertheless she haunted so anxiously.

But the others did not share this migratory impulse. For Sister Frossie would have had to leave her heart behind, while Mr. Goodchild would have regarded with distress the thought of any change except one, a return to the old home in Zenasville, Ohio.

Florence exhaled round Aurelius a magical, sweet soporific. Something within him that had always longed for nearness to the well-springs of romance and beauty was satisfied at last, and even the vision of Rome was veiled by the mist-like, golden softness of this Tuscan air. "Later," he told himself, when that vision had shown itself most clearly—"later, when I have assimilated and translated into words what Florence is trying to tell me." And at the writing-table in his bedroom overlooking the garden of the Pension Schwandorf he sat with pen in hand, his spirit hovering between the indolent present and the dynamically active past, his breast expanded by an inspiration too splendid to be reduced to black and white. Some afternoons he was forced to tear up all his day's scribblings, so inadequately did they express the fervor of his thoughts.

"Yes, art is long," he murmured to himself while slowly descending to the pension parlor for his cup of tea.

John Holland dropped in occasionally at that hour.

This celebrity, who knew so many interesting persons, who had surely moved in all sorts of imposing circles, displayed in the pension a homely satisfaction.

Now and then he brought with him a note that he had received from Mme. Bertha Linkow, who was still singing at the Metropolitan in New York. She always sent a jolly word to "those dear Goodchilds."

"What a warm heart she has," was Mr. Goodchild's comment, on one occasion when he and John Holland found themselves alone. "How is it that with all her fine friends she invariably remembers us?"

"I should say because the Goodchild family are quite as fine as any one she knows."

"But she has met crowned heads!"

"My dear friend, Bertha Linkow is fond of your daughters because she feels that she has discovered in them two lovely characters." John Holland added at once, "It is natural to say 'two' nowadays, since the third is in England."

"And soon," said Aurelius with a sigh, "I shall lose another. All the same, Lieutenant Olivuzzi is a fine young man, and I feel that he will make my Frossie happy."

"But you will still have — Confess that Thallie is just a little bit the favorite."

"Oh, no! I hope my love is equally distributed. Still, she has always been the baby, and — she resembles her mother. Poor child! she is very unhappy at present. Yet I can't help thinking that this lovers' quarrel is for the best: somehow that young Mr. Dux did n't seem very much of a home-body. Heaven forgive me, sir, if I'm unjust to him, but he seemed to me almost of the complexion of a fortune-hunter!"

John Holland had excellent control of the muscles of his mouth: his face did not change in the slightest. Aurelius explained:

"You see, each of my daughters was to receive at marriage a third of my legacy of one hundred thousand dollars."

"And if the legacy were distributed in that fashion, what would you live on yourself?"

"That does n't bother me. I've always made out famously. At this moment I have in mind two or three new inventions, which people will soon find that they can't do without. Besides, take my tragic poem alone! When that is brought out by some good, sound publishing-house the future will be plain sailing. No, they must each have their

full share: I should n't be happy otherwise. Indeed, I'd have presented Aggie with her portion on her wedding-day, but unfortunately the law withholds the distribution of the estate for a full year after the will is, ahem, probated. Next month, however, I ought to receive the fortune in toto."

"And have you decided how to invest the money?"

"Invest it? You mean, promote some worthy enterprise?"

"I mean put it in good securities, with assured principal and interest."

"It's true, I've been thinking of certain projects in which I might be tempted to engage if this fortune were to remain in my possession. But stocks and bonds? Wall Street has always seemed to me a perilous place. But after all, so far as the investment is concerned, I suppose that will be for the children to decide."

And Aurelius, smoothing down his bushy beard of red and gray, sat back with a cheerful smile, his high, white forehead tranquil, his kindly, sunken eyes fixed benevolently on space.

John Holland shook his head.

"In my opinion," he said, "if you're determined to relinquish the whole sum, you had better place it in the hands of a reliable trust company, which would pay your daughters a fixed income. Thus one is sure of the principal remaining intact."

"Would n't that be a reflection on the girls' intelligence," protested Mr. Goodchild. "Aggie, for instance, really has a marvelous amount of business acumen. It was she who got an advance of five thousand dollars on the legacy, from the Bank of Zenasville."

"Then you now have ninety-five thousand, instead of a hundred thousand, to divide."

"That's so, now I come to think of it!"

"Provided, of course, that the estate from which you derive your legacy is sufficient to distribute the various amounts in full. Sometimes, you know, the beneficiaries of a will are forced to accept a pro rata share, owing to the fact that the generosity of the legator exceeded his resources at the time of death. However," he went on quickly, as Mr. Goodchild began to look bewildered and alarmed, "that is beside the question. The main thing is, when you obtain the money you ought to safeguard it against every possible chance of loss. So I suggest a trust-company of the most conservative sort, which deals, for instance, in guarantied mortgages in town and country, in the best sort of municipal securities, or in first-mortgage public-utility bonds put out by strong corporations in districts the growth and future prosperity of which are best assured."

"And what is the return on such investments?"

"Usually four and a half per cent."

"Let me see. Is n't that rather small?"

"On the other hand, it is virtually safe."

"What a pity it seems! For myself, I care little about it, but I should like my children to have still more money. If only it were possible to find an opportunity for one of those great coups we read about! I admit I should like to double, yes, even triple, the amount before turning it over to the girls."

"Take my advice; dismiss that idea from your mind at once."

"No doubt you're right," Aurelius assented absent-mindedly. But an affectionate wistfulness lingered in his eyes, to be mingled presently with a mysterious speculation. He glanced down at his new watch-charm, the earth-colored scarab which M. Constantine Farazounis had bestowed on him, and which he had caused to be mounted in fine gold.

Unhooking this trinket, which very much resembled the sort of scarab that is now tossed out in Cairo by machinery:

"Have I shown you my latest acquisition?"

John Holland turned the scarab over in his hand.

"Where did you buy it?"

"A friend presented it to me."

"Ah, very interesting," was the only comment possible in the circumstances.

But Aurelius regretted that his promise to M. Farazounis prevented him from telling of the treasure buried in the pyramid. How a historian of dead races would have enjoyed that tale! And maybe Mr. Holland would have abandoned his dislike of all investments beyond the range of "sound trust companies" had he known that off there in Egypt lay a vast wealth of gold and silver, of pearls and rubies and what-not, all waiting for those who should equip a desert caravan, a train of camels in sufficient numbers to bring off that fabulous hoard.

Was it by telepathic influence that these thoughts impinged so sharply upon Mr. Goodchild's brain? That very day Constantine Farazounis returned to Florence. The following afternoon, spying Aurelius through the plate-glass window of the Café Hirsch, the Greek dashed in through the doorway with a rapturous cry, and almost embraced his friend before the interested patrons.

He had on a new plush waistcoat still comparatively free from stains. The approach of spring, perhaps, had tempted him to acquire a pair of lemon-colored boots with needle-toes. His flowing tie was negligently tucked aside to reveal a large yellow diamond in the bosom of his shirt. Moreover, his swarthy jaws were covered with talc-powder; his crinkly mustaches, loaded with brilliantine, glistened in rivalry with his coffee-colored eyeballs, while what with his flat vermilion lips and shining beak, his aura of cigarettes

and violet-water, his whole vivid and refreshed appearance, he stimulated Mr. Goodchild instantly.

"My gentleman! To think that I rejoin your sympathetic company at last!"

"Yes, you have been away for ages."

"My travels, ah, let us not talk of them, my sir! The life of a dog! But see; all in my wanderings your gift was in my hand!" And M. Farazounis thrust forward dramatically the cane with the golden sphinx's head, his Christmas present from Aurelius.

"Meanwhile," the latter responded with a shy smile, "I've worn your scarab."

"It is so! What friends we are, we two! Otto! Is he still here, that Otto? Black coffee, Otto, and plenty of pastry, and a pack of Giubek cigarettes. Remember, to-day I pay the bill!"

"Black coffee, pastry, Giubeks," moaned Otto, as his short legs, bending from an exhaustion due to chronic melancholy, bore his fat little body slowly away to the buffet.

"I hope you have been successful," Aurelius ventured.

"Successful! What is successful! The other days I have sold a first sketch of the 'Maltese Knight,' yes, by Giorgione himself. The only trouble was, a dear old friend of mine, who had it in his family for hundreds years, sat down on it by mistake just before I called for it. But what is a crack or two in a Giorgione! Yet I receive for it a bagatelle, a few miserable pittances!" His voice sank; he darted round him a furtive look; he leaned forward with his old-time air of mystery. "Ah, what is such profits to great souls of ambition, like me and you, knowing that in a certain place is wealth beyond thinking?"

"You have not yet found an associate for that enterprise?" asked Mr. Goodchild, timidly.

"Ha! Who can I trust so much? Excuse me, the

world are not all like you, my gentleman. But enough for now! Here comes Otto, the spy perhaps of German archæologists, with those big ears of his."

And as the lugubrious little Swiss waiter scuffled to the table with his tray, M. Constantine Farazounis, humming an exotic tune, looked innocently out through the plate-glass window upon the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele.

But suddenly he uttered an exclamation of surprise. A woman had just passed along the street, a raven-haired, striking-looking person of many curves and undulations. Mr. Goodchild's mouth fell open. It was the International Star!

"What," he exclaimed, "you know that lady?"

M. Farazounis gave Aurelius a swift look of speculation, then craned his neck elaborately after the departing vaudeville actress. With a laugh of vexation he responded:

"Something funny is the matter with my eyes to-day! I took her for a Sicilian contessa who once bought from me some trifles of antique jewelries. But this lady is familiar to you, my sir?"

"I have seen her and admired her performance on the stage. Her name is Madame Nella Tesore. I'm sorry that you don't know her; you might possibly have asked her permission to present me for a moment's chat. I should have taken much pleasure in complimenting her exceptional artistry."

The Greek, after staring at Aurelius for some seconds as if in a trance, wagged his head with profound regret.

"I, too, am verree sorry that I have not the honors of this madame's acquaintance."

When it was time for them to part, M. Farazounis promised faithfully to return to the Café Hirsch the following afternoon. And this he was kind enough to do, so that Mr. Goodchild's romantic friendship with the adventurer began

to flourish as before. Otto, to whom the Greek had taken a dislike, now seldom found the chance to droop beside the marble-topped table and pour out his troubles to Aurelius.

One day, however, when Farazounis had not yet appeared, the rotund little waiter confessed that he was nearly ready to give up the struggle of life.

"*Ach*, but I am tired of it all, Mr. Gootschild — the same black coffees always to and fro, the same sore feet, the same artists and penny-a-liners *mit* their penny tips, the same prison-valls around me! Only a vaiter, yes; but in here, in my boosom, is something yet! Here is still stewing and bubbling the old thoughts vhat I had vhen I vas young. And some days, vhen all this boils up in my heart, I could take off my apron and throw it in the face of the proprietor, and shout out before the whole Café Hirsch: 'I am done! I am a human soul, not the slave of a *Kaffeehaus*-keeper *mit* so small a genius vhat I vould n't allow him to peel vegetables in an hotel of mine. I am finished *mit* you all, *mit* you, *dummkopf* chef, who have never in your life served up a *crêpes des gourmets*, or a *faisan à la financière*, or a *poulet Albuféra*, and *mit* you also, sqvalid clientele, who have never eaten such things or know as they exist, and *mit* you, pig-dog of a vorld, vhat permits me to die unsatisfied in my honest ambitions!'"

Aurelius protested:

"My poor Otto, with those words you seem to give me a clue to your misfortunes. Perhaps in upbraiding the world, in feeling this hostility to your associates, you repel the favorable influence of the universe. By your bitterness you shut out the divine benevolence; your despair isolates you from the current of celestial supply; in short, you are out of tune with the infinite. But smile on humanity, and see how quickly it will smile on you! Replace your sense of lack with an expectation of prosperity, and note the change in

fortune! 'As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.' We are all the makers of our lives; the remedy lies with ourselves in this, as in every other karma."

And Mr. Goodchild, his lean, black-clad body erect against the mirror-lined wall, his ascetic, bearded face illumined by a missionary's zeal, preached for the little waiter's benefit the doctrine of New Thought, strongly flavored with theosophy, as he heard it nowadays from the lips of Princess Tchernitza.

For his acquaintance with the obese Bulgarian had not ended at the carnival ball.

He had accepted the invitation to those Tuesday afternoons of hers; he had taken Frossie with him, and once Thallie had consented to accompany them. They had met with curious adventures.

In an apartment on Viale Principe Amadeo, a suite of rooms lighted, though it was daytime, only by dim Benares lamps, the guests moved and gibbered like wraiths amid clouds of Asiatic incense. There in the gloom one saw gathered together the coiffures, costumes and ornaments of that esoteric race which knows no special country; there one caught the peculiar expressions which reflect natures striving with a febrile intensity to be abnormal. The high walls, half lost in shadows and curling smoke, were covered with Oriental draperies sewn with scraps of looking-glass; brass Buddhas smiled somnolently in the corners, and here and there, beneath canopies embroidered with Zodiacal signs, a sinuous woman with barbaric ear-rings, or with a carved pebble fastened to her forehead, whispered soulfully to some long-haired, pallid man in mandarin-spectacles and Windsor tie.

Princess Tchernitza's mountainous person loomed forth from the obscurity. In a hoarse whisper she greeted the Goodchilds, named the adjacent guests, presented a few,

who seemed either drugged by their environment or else suffering from some mysterious affection of the nerves. Servants, whose peasant faces expressed embarrassment, slid by with tea and coffee. Then, maybe, a chord was struck on the piano, and in the hush, to a capricious accompaniment, a voice that seemed neither male nor female recited in slow cadences something about Lilith, a pale, far-off star, a lotus moistened with dew which had been falling for eons through infinity.

While walking homeward, Mr. Goodchild had to reprove Frossie for her levity.

"But Dad, they're a regular zoo!"

"My dear, since we accept Princess Tchernitza's hospitality, we hardly ought to criticize her parties. You see, your sister does n't say such things."

"I was still knocked speechless by astonishment," vouchsafed Thallie, listlessly. "Even yet, I find it hard to realize that any one could have collected such a bunch of nuts in Florence."

"Hush now, Thallie! We really must n't ridicule what we don't get the gist of. But as for their numbers, Florence, I find, is a well-known center of the occult. I must certainly invest in some of their literature, if I'm to talk to these new friends intelligently."

And next day John Holland found him wandering away from Schreiber's book-shop, eagerly turning the pages of Blavatsky's "Secret Doctrine."

The historian had no remarks to make about this new enthusiasm, or even about the circle which had caused it. Possibly as an antidote, however, he introduced the Goodchilds into some gatherings of a different sort. And finally the girls found themselves in slight contact with the local nobility, which in Giacinta's tearoom had filled them with romantic conjectures.

But John Holland, well aware that snobbishness existed even in the Tuscan aristocracy, avoided ushering his simple friends into an atmosphere too rare and chilly for their comfort. He selected from among his many acquaintances in Florence the ones whose intrinsic nobility could be depended on to set shy folk at ease. As a result, in their glimpses of Florentine society Thallie and Frossie saw none of that rose-scented dalliance, that repellent yet fascinating amorous obliquity, which they had imagined from their surreptitious novel-reading to be the very circumambieny of Latin titles. True that they met at last, in the cool hall of a fine old villa, or in the faded drawing-room of a veritable *palazzetto*, more than one contessa, marchesa and baronessa in the flesh. But the aged Contessa di Monfalcone was so pious that one could not imagine her as ever having been otherwise; the gentle Marchesa di Premuda fairly execrated Gabriele d'Annunzio's early books, while Baronessa d'Idria, though possessing a title as ancient as that of any heroine of Marion Crawford's, had let two seasons pass without altering the fashion of her black silk dress. Moreover, the sisters once took tea with a lady no less fashionably alluring than she was high-born, who nevertheless seemed as devoted to domesticity as the wife of a shopkeeper!

The girls felt that they ought to be pleased by these revelations, yet somehow both were vaguely disappointed. But in Thallie's case there resulted also a self-contempt still more profound than that which had abased her formerly.

For in spite of the diversions with which all were plying her, Thallie still suffered from emotional relapses.

With April creeping northward, with a blander sunshine covering the hills, she was often forced to stay at home, in her long-chair by the open window, motionless beneath a vast lassitude, oppressed by what seemed to her an eternal hopelessness. With a thrill of anguish she heard the first

provocative notes of questing birds. Ah, if only spring would stay away — this cruel, sweet spring, in all its manifestations so poignantly suggesting the hours that would never come again! Its sounds, its pure scents, its delicate colors and soft caresses, caused the half-healed wounds to reopen, as if this maimed heart, like all the rest of nature, were automatically swelling with the same old fervor.

But the others did not let Thallie have many of those wretched hours. They drew her out with them on fresh excursions into the country, where spring, alas! was more evident than in the city. The Easter season came round; on Good Friday they packed her off to Grassina, a little town not far from Florence, where at twilight, down from the church amid a blaze of torches, wended a humble, pinch-beck cortège to illustrate the Passion. On Easter-day John Holland took them to a window overlooking the Piazza del Duomo, where, to the banging of fireworks, a mechanical dove, emerging from a tall car, rushed sputtering on a wire into the cathedral and straight up to the high altar.

Then the opera season began at the Politeama Fiorentino. And there, of all places, Thallie had to sit listening to the music of Puccini.

Between the acts they noticed a big man with a pear-shaped face and a black, fanlike beard. John Holland pronounced his name. It was Valentino Mughetto, the singing-teacher who had sentenced Aglaia to a life of silence. And through the rest of the opera Mr. Goodchild thought only of his poor Aggie, in far-off Devonshire.

If he could just feel sure that she was happy there!

As a matter of fact, Aglaia was as happy in England as she had expected to be. Even before her marriage to Cyril Bellegram she had felt that serious dilemmas awaited her at Twelve Chimneys, Devonshire. She had taken it for granted that she would encounter there the famous "insular

prejudice." She had anticipated the resentment of an established family forced to admit a nobody into their circle. She had even been prepared to have the animosity of the Bellegrams leveled at her alone. In none of these presumptions was she altogether disappointed.

She found her new relatives polite, but cool. She immediately perceived that they considered this union a misalliance. And at dinner on the night of her arrival it was evident that her father-in-law, the baronet, had determined to procure as soon as possible a berth for Cyril in some foreign land.

Aggie had no objection to that plan.

She had never intended to remain at Twelve Chimneys longer than was absolutely necessary. Though impressed despite herself by England and the Bellegrams, Aggie was not the one to long for a lifetime of subservience to either. Since she had invested, so to speak, in Cyril, she wanted to develop her new property without patriarchal or conventional interference. All the ardor with which she had once aspired to be a prima donna was now diverted to the alternative, the chance of becoming the helpmate of a diplomatic attaché. Her weeks of humdrum country life in Devonshire strengthened, instead of weakening, this intention. So the baronet, by placing Cyril in some distant post at the disposal of the foreign office, would be doing her the greatest favor in his power.

This is not to say that Aggie made no effort to alter the Bellegrams' attitude toward her. Indeed, her nature almost rejoiced in the problem of abating their distrust and prejudice. From the hour of her arrival at Twelve Chimneys she went to work with all her wiles, employing one general method for the women, another for the men, and yet using against each person a still more special manner of appeal. In consequence, the Bellegram family began to change their

minds about her; and when it became known that something highly interesting was going to happen before long, the general thaw was resolved into a freshet of friendliness.

As for Cyril, he redoubled his demonstrations of gratitude and awe. Even in familiarity, this fragile creature of pale tints and subtle graces remained for him the epitome of all his dream-girls.

His emotions never failed to interest Aglaia. Still, in the midst of the most fervid expressions of his love, she sometimes felt a curious pity, for herself as well as for her husband, because she was forced to feign the commensurate enthusiasm, that he could not evoke. Would her sisters, she asked herself, suffer that same disillusion? She wondered if Frossie, for instance, would find behind the veil of Aphrodite's sanctuary something that she had missed.

For there was no doubt in her mind that Frossie would soon be married to Camillo Olivuzzi.

Camillo and Frossie were of the same opinion.

Their romance was peculiar in that there had been no actual proposal of marriage. Long since, in their tête-à-têtes, there had stolen over them a feeling of curious familiarity, a satisfaction so nearly perfect that they seemed to have been gravitating toward each other from the beginning of the world. They were, indeed, less like newly found affinities than lovers who had come together after a long separation. All the preliminary petitions and avowals appeared to have been made in the remotest past, far beyond the border-land of memory, and now, as if on the verge of a predestined reunion, they moved with more than youth's assurance toward their future.

Indeed, while considering the future, they often fell to talking as though they were already married. Camillo, whose early years in the wild hills of the Abruzzi had implanted in him much of the simplicity of nature, was inca-

pable of the evasive thoughts which make many engagements seem the prelude of an immaterial relationship. Frossie, who had once been the most reticent of the Goodchild family, felt her reserve already giving way to frankness when she planned with this inevitable mate the details of their life in common. Her healthy longings were thoroughly permeated with the maternal instinct now, and with one clear look she would promise Camillo not only love, but also in brimming measure its perennially legitimate rewards. Those two harmonious young persons even got so far as to agree on the upbringing of their children.

All visions of their life together were suffused with a rosy glow, as if from the fire of a peaceful hearth. Their proposed economies, their ingeniously planned expedients, the whole depictment of the household of their expectations, took on a beauty far more touching than would have pervaded the most splendid palace. There rose before their minds' eyes a hundred scenes of simple domesticity, each picture fulfilling an intense desire of their hearts.

"It must be soon," they told each other, gaze melting into gaze, as their very souls seemed to swell forward, impatient for that final interminglement.

And again Camillo wondered if he ought not to inform his father of their purpose.

The old Count Olivuzzi, a gentleman of great punctiliousness despite his rural life, would certainly think it needful to journey from his dilapidated hill-fortress down to Florence, inspect the bride-to-be, and approach Mr. Goodchild with a ceremonious proposal. Camillo, though his admiration for everything American suggested a less formal course, was too fond of his father to deny him this exercise of dignity. On one point, however, the young lieutenant was privately determined to defy tradition: there should be no argument about a dowry.

"Here is one marriage, at least," Camillo decided, "that shall not be called a dollar-hunt. All Florence, and as much of the rest of Italy as cares to look, shall see a man who pays his American wife the compliment of wedding her for herself."

But since his father would be sure to object, at the top of his voice, to any such generosity, Camillo, out of reluctance to begin that altercation, still postponed sending off the news.

Nevertheless, they had decided to be married in June.

Frossie was already pondering her wedding-dress: it was to be of "white charmeuse, draped so and so, and trimmed with that nice princess lace in the shop on Via Strozzi." The style of the veil gave her thought: she was in doubt whether, after all, to choose one gathered closely round the head. By way of experiment, she tried on a breakfast-cap to which she had pinned a tulle scarf. This device concealed the unusually vivid auburn of her hair; but, on the other hand, Camillo had told her that these same locks were more lovely than any that Titian had painted.

"Is it possible," she wondered, while staring into the mirror, "that he really thinks me good-looking?"

Yet Frossie, who had never had a delusion that she was a beauty, could not help perceiving a happy change in her appearance. Her firm figure, slightly fuller than last year, still left nothing to be desired, except perhaps in the opinion of those critics whose ideals are centered in a more ethereal and less practical attractiveness. But her good, wholesome face, still slightly freckled round the nose, had taken on the peculiar luminousness due to joy, so that while the features themselves had not yet altered in the slightest, one saw in that countenance the reflection of a heart so full of love that there was some to spare for all the world.

"If only I were a Christian Scientist, and could do without my glasses!"

Still, it was pleasant to be wearing them sometimes, so that Camillo could remove them gently, in order to kiss her eyelids.

But the sincerest natures will maintain their little coquetties. Frossie was still unwilling to have him see her in the horn spectacles that she wore when she was writing.

Love, far from interfering with her writing, had acted on it as a tonic: the impulse to create had stimulated even the immaterial function of artistic effort. Her literary endeavors were now informed with a new clarity and ease; the pen glided more surely than before; when the day's work was done there were fewer torn pages in the waste-paper basket. Frossie believed that at last she was on the road to solid accomplishment. After studying all the technical books provided by John Holland, she had finally abandoned the field of historical fiction for the realistic style.

Now and then she read one of her chapters to Camillo.

"Why, look here, that is you and I!" he exclaimed, with sudden excitement.

"Yes, perhaps it is you and I; but it is life, too."

"Ah, that! I should say so! And beautiful as well."

"And beautiful as well."

Of evenings,—for it was still too chilly for the garden,—they all sat together upstairs: since Aggie's departure one of the bedrooms had been converted into a parlor. Camillo, permitted to smoke one-half of a Toscano, tempted Mr. Goodchild into an old debate of theirs—"Why, in war, should men be allowed to do in the mass such deeds as they would be punished for committing individually in times of peace?" Frossie, smiling impartially at the two disputants, at last called the argument a draw. And when the

father and the fiancé had shaken hands with burlesque gravity, they all had lemonade.

"How happy they are!" thought Thallie. "A whole lifetime of happiness before them!"

Indeed, Frossie and Camillo behaved like two persons who possessed a talisman to open all the treasures of life. In time she was to become a great author, to entrap between the covers of her books the essence of alien countries as successfully as Mme. de Staël in "*De l'Allemagne*" and "*Corinne*." He was to rise from rank to rank in the Italian army, until on a day of field-manœuvres, when the landscape was covered for many miles with floods of steel, he paced a hill, in the gold braid and blue velvet facings of the general staff, beside the king.

Meanwhile it did not in the least daunt Camillo that he was still a mere lieutenant of the Magenta Cavalry, or that he had not yet won the military brevet for aviators.

His examination for that honor was to take place in May. Three or four times a week he rode out to Baron di Campoformio's hangars near Quarto for his lessons in the management of *aéroplanes*.

Frossie and Mr. Goodchild sometimes appeared to watch the flights.

Aurelius, at least, could not understand why Thallie would never accompany them to the Villa Campoformio, especially when the baron was kind enough to put his motor-car at their disposal. And such a fine motor-car! The limousine, evidently designed in the first place for a lady's use, was upholstered with plum-colored cloth as sumptuously as a little boudoir!

Thallie did not even show herself on the balcony when they were entering that vehicle.

Antonio, the baron's dexterous chauffeur, conducted

them quickly through the budding countryside. Soon the motor-car drew up beside the wall topped with large stone urns and overshadowed by the foliage of ilex-trees. Antonio pulled the bell-knob in the gatepost, swore under his breath, and pulled again. At last, in his own good time, the man-servant in the green baize apron ushered the visitors into a garden already powdered with pale verdure, in the depths of which, behind some lofty cypresses, appeared the white stairway and terrace of the house. The Goodchilds found the baron consulting with his gardener about the early roses.

Campoformio's lean, weather-beaten face expressed that cordiality which seems an attribute of country gentlemen everywhere. His attire as well as his manner made them forget his title: he wore his old shooting-coat; his thin hair was blown by the breeze. When he had discussed with Aurelius the prospects of the flower-garden, he led his guests into the house for tea.

He apologized for the appearance of the drawing-room, which, because of its amplitude and light had been ruthlessly converted by the baron into a den.

The walls, hung with yellow brocade, showed here and there rectangular patches of a deeper color, where pictures, of a dainty sort, perhaps, had been removed for the benefit of English sporting-prints. On the tables some bric-à-brac was almost engulfed by well-worn pamphlets, books, scraps of saddlery and gun-locks. Ash-trays on rods stood round about; one noticed a liquor-cabinet, a phonograph, a piano-forte the treble keys of which were burned by cigarettes. Over the fireplace was suspended an oil-portrait of the baron's dead American wife: a charming, fragile face looked wistfully down into this room from which the evidences of a woman's taste and care were half-obliterated.

The place was plainly one of those famous bachelor lairs

that servants are under strict orders not to tidy up. Frossie, gazing round her, felt an almost overpowering impulse to set everything to rights. She regarded the baron compassionately, as if he were a child that, left to its own devices, had made a mess of its surroundings.

"Poor man!" she thought. "Somebody really ought to marry him at once."

Then Camillo arrived, and Frossie forgot the baron's pressing needs.

When they had drunk their tea, they set out for the flying-field. Camillo rode beside the motor-car, a brave sight in his gay uniform without a speck or wrinkle. His large, lustrous eyes glowed with expectancy in the shadow of his patent-leather vizor; his white teeth flashed beneath his up-twirled black mustaches; and Frossie wondered if ever any girl had won so debonair a cavalier.

But she admired him still more when he strode out from the hangar in his flying-suit, his strong, compact torso muffled in a cowhide jacket, his creamy pallor accentuated by a padded helmet of black leather. She looked at him with awe as he confidently approached the Maurice Farman biplane, which the baron's men had pushed out upon the turf. Yet when he climbed into the driver's seat she always felt a thrill of fear.

"Do be careful, now!" she would cry.

"He is always careful," the baron would assure her.

"You're certain you've tested the thing all over?"

"Every wire."

"You've — you've got enough gasolene?"

Laughing assent, Camillo raised his hand, then dropped it upon the throttle. The propellers whirled round; the engine racketed; the aëroplane glided forward, skimmed the ground, rose into the air, swiftly dwindled against the blue. The mechanics, still fascinated by this strange new thing

which had come into the world, stood motionless, staring with alert, grave eyes.

They muttered comments to each other.

"He goes well to-day, the Signor Tenente."

"A good turn. No more of those narrow circles."

"Figure of eight! Eh, he could take his tests now!"

Presently the biplane seemed to expand in that pellucid void. The drone of the engine swelled into a clatter. Suddenly those explosions ceased, and Frossie's heart stood still. But the machine, slipping down with the assurance of a great insect on poised wings, alighted with an appearance of fastidious grace, ran toward them, delicately trembling on its wheels, and stopped a dozen yards away. There he sat, safe and sound, as if he had never left the earth.

After all, thought Frossie, what could happen even in the midst of space to a man who wore that conquering mien, who met one's eyes with a look which seemed to say, "You see, I have vanquished the air, as I shall vanquish all the future, for your sake."

Yes, this was the one thought that moved him nowadays.

Every night, in his small white room in the cavalry barracks, he studied map-reading, the principles of meteorology, hygrometry, barometrical pressure, temperature, clouds, winds, and air-resistance. His old boon-companions, Azeglio and Fava, saw less of him than ever.

Those two light-hearted idlers told Camillo that his uncanny industry was bound to make him ill. Since he refused to heed their warnings, they could do no more than take better care than ever not to be ill themselves — at least, as a result of any industry not called for by the regulations.

On most fine afternoons one might still observe that precious pair displaying their martial finery before the Nobles' Club in Via Tornabuoni, or adding their magnificence to the assemblage in Giacinta's tearoom, or strolling

through the shady avenues of the Circonvallazione with a group of lissome, dark-eyed ladies related to their colleagues. At such times, to judge from the laughter of their fair companions, Fava and Azeglio could be sufficiently droll. Their highly expressive gestures afforded even passers-by an inkling of the comic tales which they related. One gathered that here were two young men who, without a grain of real malice, enjoyed nothing so much as a good prank.

One day, when they had confessed to each other that they were greatly bored with life, Azeglio and Fava encountered Mr. Goodchild in the street.

They shook hands with him effusively, exchanged a hopeful look, invited him to take a little walk. Aurelius consented gladly. The lieutenants flanked him like a guard of honor. Three abreast, they set out through the sunny thoroughfares of Florence, the long, wrinkled cutaway coat in interesting contrast with the dapper jackets of the Magenta Cavalry. Whenever they passed a private soldier,—and the streets seemed a-swarm that afternoon with troopers, bersaglieri, infantry of the line, and grenadiers,—Mr. Goodchild, out of courtesy, emulated his young friends' acknowledgment of the salutes by raising from his domelike brow the famous black felt hat.

He reproached the lieutenants for not having visited the Pension Schwandorf in a week.

"But I called there yesterday," Toto Fava answered, with a sigh. "Alas! every one was out."

"Impossible! Thallie at least stayed in all afternoon."

"Then," Fava suggested, curling up his rat-tail mustaches to a vicious angle, "she was indisposed, no doubt."

"It's true, she has n't been very well of late. You see, in the long run the air of Italy is enervating to foreigners."

"Ah, yes, it is dreadfully enervating, our air," was Fava's morose assent.

"Unless one drinks the wine," Azeglio amended slyly.

"Really?"

"But of course. A very famous physician, the king's, in fact, has said so in the vital statistics, in a footnote—correct me if I am in error, Toto—in a footnote to page 721. The chapter is entitled, 'Curious Sympathy Existing Between the Italian Wineshop and the National Gullet.' By the way, we might have a little now, just a drop?"

At once, Toto Fava's ill-assorted features lost their look of pessimism.

"To be sure! As a matter of precaution, eh?"

But at that moment there approached them on the footpath a woman bearing a green parasol, rather smartly dressed in an excessive way, a raven-haired woman of many curves and undulations, from the lobes of whose ears dangled two enormous imitation pearls. Aurelius was face to face with the International Star.

"Bah!" cried Lieutenant Fava in delight. "It is our old Nella!"

And in a trice the young soldiers had presented Mr. Goodchild.

Nella Tesore, her face thickly whitewashed, her forehead ornamented with a glossy, jet-black bang, was one of those almost flagrant-looking creatures who are capable of filling a whole music-hall with perturbation. More bizarre than handsome even without her make-up, she produced by the very singularity of her appearance a sensation which other vaudeville artists could not cause with more conventional charms. Her inky eyes were set too close together, her nose was negligible, her rouged mouth was excessively large; yet in combination these defective features seemed to promise many men something at once extraordinary and

familiar, for which they had searched in vain all through maturity. And possibly because many a poor fellow had told her so, the Tesore greeted all men with a wide smile of amiable expectancy and generosity.

Thus she greeted Mr. Goodchild, while giving him her large, plump hand, which seemed to be bursting from its glove. Nor was she put out when Aurelius stammered that he was still ill at ease both in Italian and in French. As befitted an international star, she responded gaily in her full, hoarse voice:

"All-a right; zen we zall allaways spick English, you and I!"

Mr. Goodchild was still more dazzled by this versatility.

The Tesore, it seemed, had only recently returned from a phenomenal success in Rome. In two weeks she was going to delight the Florentines once more at the Alhambra. Meanwhile one could find her in her old quarters at the Hôtel des Grands Ducs, in Via de' Leoni. She trusted that all her friends would call on her — after telephoning to make sure that she was in.

While the others rattled on, Aurelius strove to arrange the long-premeditated speech in homage to her art that he had dreamed of proffering to the Tesore. But self-distrust, an ailment natural in the presence of dramatic genius, reduced his thoughts to incoherence. His hat clutched between his hands, his narrow shoulders bowed, his sensitive face displaying a dazed look, he stood on the narrow foot-path like a tall image of humility, while passing pedestrians kept bumping him about.

All at once he realized that the Tesore was saying good-by. Again putting out her hand, dilating her near-set eyes in a languorous and pleading way, she asked him:

"Alzo you, Signore?"

"I beg pardon, ma'am?"

"Alzo you, Hôtel des Grands Ducs, Via de' Leoni?"

"Thank you; indeed I will!"

His hand half lowered, he stood staring after her as she wended her way up the street, her exuberant yet flexible person undulating under the green parasol, the imitation pearls dangling regally from her ear-lobes, her high-heeled shoes bending outward from the ankles. The fascination of the stage transfigured her, amid the ordinary crowd, as if with a faint nimbus.

"And now," asked Azeglio, nudging Toto Fava, "who owes the vote of thanks?"

"I!" cried Aurelius, fervently. "I, sir, a thousand times! You have done me a favor that I shall not forget."

"One sees," said Fava, laughing, "that you are not insensible to brunettes."

"But," Mr. Goodchild protested, "do you hold, then, that polarity has any influence on one's appreciation of fame?"

And he looked at them with so naïve, so academic, an interest, that both of those young rascals dropped their eyes, as though in search of ribald entertainment they had blundered into a monastery. Soon after that, indeed, they excused themselves and slunk away, if any one may really seem to slink while clad in such a jaunty uniform as that of the Magenta Cavalry.

How kind fate was, Aurelius told himself, to bring him at last into touch with the associations that he had always longed for! Only a year ago it had seemed as if he were not to gain contact with the great figures in the world of art until his daughters had won renown themselves. Nevertheless, he already knew, in Mme. Bertha Linkow, a celebrated prima donna, in the International Star a rare ornament of the Italian theater, and in John Holland a serious author of the highest reputation.

"Mr. Holland! I must certainly tell him of my good luck in meeting Madame Tesore!"

But an unexpected occurrence prevented Aurelius from imparting this news to the historian.

That same afternoon John Holland was sitting at a desk in the Archæological Museum. By this time in the whole building there was no relic that he did not know as well as if he himself had made it; he had long since finished with the work that excused his stay in Florence; his present occupation was about as useful to his current book as if he had been playing with a picture-puzzle. Just now he was trying, more idly than most men who had tried before him, to decipher some fragments of the Etruscan language.

He pushed aside the folios, threw down his pencil, stared out of the open window at the April sky. A small, thin Italian of twenty-seven or eight, with clever eyes and an inquisitive nose, looked up from a neighboring desk.

"What success, Signore Holland?" this young man inquired pleasantly.

"Have you on file, by any chance, the duplicates of Butler's Lydian inscriptions?"

"The American professor? Unfortunately, no."

"Then I think I shall call it a day."

The young man jumped up with a laugh.

"I, too, shall call it a day. Eh, this spring air! Besides, I danced till two o'clock this morning."

"It's good to find a student of archæology so gay."

"Oh, as for that, Signore Holland, it seems to me that I caught you at a carnival ball not long ago!"

"I did n't see you."

"Say, rather, that you did n't recognize me. I was charmingly disguised. I wore a pig's head of papier-mâché."

John Holland laughed.

"And no doubt had some interesting adventures?"

"I observed an interesting one. But judge for yourself. In a certain box there was a young girl with red hair, evidently an American, but beautiful enough to bring tears into the eyes. I know that, because for a moment she took off her mask. In her party were three of those insufferable cavalry lieutenants, and a fair youth, also an American, I think. Well, in the midst of the ball, this fair youth takes my little beauty out for a motor-ride in Cascine Park, and presently returns alone, with a visage — how shall I say? — like that of *Jason* in the eighteenth canto of our Alighieri's 'Inferno.' And though I have not seen him since, I have seen her in the street, and, by Bacchus! her look is changed also. For if he reappeared that night like *Jason* in the eighteenth canto, now she resembles, perhaps, the maiden *Hypsipyle*? Ah, yes, the carnival ball has furnished that poor little one, at least, with an adventure!"

After a while the historian slowly turned his rugged countenance toward the other.

"My friend," he said quietly, "if I were you, I should not repeat that story."

The young man flushed.

"No doubt you are right."

John Holland rose to his feet. His shoulders were slightly bowed, possibly from too much of this recent desk-work that had led to nothing, yet he towered above the young man like a colossus. He went to a clothes-tree, took his hat and cane and gloves, laid a hand upon the door-knob, then paused to say:

"By the way, if I don't see you again before I go, good-by, and many thanks for all your services. Since my work is done, I shall probably leave town to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

CAMILLO WINS THE HIGHEST OF ALL MILITARY BREVETS

JOHN HOLLAND'S sudden departure from Florence saddened Aurelius. Unconsciously, the latter had come to depend on the historian for something like stability of thought. The mentor gone, it was as if a more or less efficient gyroscope had been removed from Mr. Goodchild's brain.

To be sure, John Holland had not left without repeating his advice about the legacy, of which the payment was now due. He had even given Aurelius a letter to a trust company in New York, had instructed him how to place the money in that corporation's charge. Indeed, he had drilled Mr. Goodchild in the necessary procedure till an error seemed impossible.

But, unfortunately, the check did not arrive at once.

Meanwhile, in the Café Hirsch, Constantine Farazounis continued to radiate the glamour of one who knows the whereabouts of buried treasure. On none of those afternoons when he and Aurelius sat together at their coffee did the Greek neglect to whisper of that precious hoard. His dramatic recital conducted Mr. Goodchild swiftly across seas and sands, down into the black entry of a pyramid the tip of which pierced a pallid moon, along damp corridors crowded with monstrous shadows like the outraged, impotent wraiths of ancient kings. Then, in a chamber scarred all over with the chisel-marks of long-dead artisans,

one peered through a crevice into the vault that human ingenuity had imagined sealed forever; and suddenly a faint ray of light revealed more wealth than Croesus showed to Solon.

Ah, the gold furniture encrusted everywhere with pearls, the masks with ruby eyes, the *ushebtî* figures carved from a single emerald!

But for Aurelius something still more thrilling than precious stones and metals seemed to fill that crypt — a vibration, as it were, from the mysterious past, a strange force stored up in all those beautiful objects, as if, should one press them to the heart, one might faintly feel the passions of their first possessors. A profound longing, half sentimental, half venal, pervaded Mr. Goodchild. He muttered to himself, "Does all this affect me so intensely because I lived there in some previous existence?" Yet, at the same time, since few students even of Epictetus have quite passed beyond cupidity, the treasure-heaps expanded before him like a glittering inundation, till he saw, beyond the plate-glass window of the café, the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele paved in gold, the flashing casements of the houses changed to mammoth jewels, the passers-by transformed into magnified *ushebtî* images of emerald, topaz, sapphire and chryso-prase. With a start, he rubbed his eyes.

"It's like a dream," he stammered.

"A dream that you and I could make come true, my gentleman," replied Constantine Farazounis, more softly than the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

No wonder that the conservative trust company seemed tame to Mr. Goodchild!

There was now another influence at work in opposition to such staid prospects. Aurelius had begun to ask himself if Otto, with a modest capital in hand, might not become a successful hotel-keeper, after all.

First this idea had been merely one of those benevolent
which are enjoyed without the slightest cost.
He had reflected, "If this legacy were to remain at my
disposal, which of course it is n't; if I had no other thoughts
concerning investing it, which of course I have, what a pleasure it
would be to give this poor, hampered soul a lift to his
feet!" His imagination, always active when the for-
m of altruistic pictures was concerned, reveled in the
where he, dashing off a check for a few thousand
dollars, proposed to the little Swiss waiter an informal
friendship. But the more Mr. Goodchild considered this
honorable rôle, the greater was his regret that he could not
do it.

He was even tempted to put Otto through a quiz about
management of "chic hotels."

He responded with an avalanche of data, amid the dust
of which, so to speak, Aurelius glimpsed a splendid dining-
room exclusively patronized by grand dukes and princesses of
old blood, a pageantry of exotic foods and wines, Gipsy
music in a fine frenzy, bills as long as Chinese banners, and
in the office a cascade of bank-notes pouring into the till.
He feared that the profits of a chic hotel could be enor-

gous! In a case like that, a good impulse would bring
with it so a material reward."

"Ease, Mr. Gootschild?"

"Pardon me, Otto, I was just thinking aloud. A little
coffee, kindly."

"Black coffee," moaned Otto, his chest collapsing behind
his padded plastron, his sore feet wending automatically
toward the buffet.

"In the same, the mere prospect would make a new man
of me?"

Goodchild was learning that affluence has its prob-

lems as well as poverty: new anxieties were replacing the old dilemmas of Zenasville, Ohio.

"Zenasville! How far away it seems!"

Leaning back against the mirrors of the Café Hirsch, Aurelius tried to conjure up the stretch of Maple Lane, the broken picket-fence, the small, yellowish house, the studio. But to his dismay all details remained indefinite! With a sensation of alarm he called for pen and paper. Bending close to the marble-topped table, he strove to re-invigorate that failing vision by writing to Dr. Numble and the Inchkins.

Every day, though letters from Zenasville now came to him but rarely, he awaited the postman with cheerful anticipations. Nor was he cast down when Domenico, the little door-porter of the pension, informed him with a sympathetic smile, "It looks like there is nothing this time neither, sir." "To-morrow, then," Aurelius exclaimed, his confidence leaping forward in undiminished strength toward the receding goal-post. To-morrow! To-morrow! What disappointment could the Fates contrive to quench the optimism of Aurelius Goodchild, Esquire?

Sometimes, however, his expectations were rewarded by a note from Aggie.

She, too, was becoming restless about the payment of the legacy. In fact, she had written to the executors of the estate, who had replied that the money would be turned over to her father some time in May. Had he received it yet? How soon might she expect to have her share?

Her anxiety on this account was greatly increased by a catastrophe in Devonshire.

It appeared that the Bellegrams' relative in the British foreign office had not put himself out to get a diplomatic post for Cyril. The waiting-list for such appointments was a long one; the requirements were strict. While influ-

ence might possibly overcome these obstacles, every one at Twelve Chimneys finally perceived that the foreign office functionary was for some reason averse to making the attempt. Indeed, that gentleman at last suggested for Cyril a "more suitable" position in the consular service.

At this proposal, it was as if a brutal hand had stripped from Aggie's person the three plumes, the long tulle veil, the court-train, which composed the feminine insignia in the British diplomatic corps. In one dreadful moment the imaginary state apartments, glittering with a thousand candles, full of coronets, golden epaulets, and diamond orders, receded, grew dim, were absorbed by the proscenium of an opera-house, which now trembled with a vague radiance far beyond the horizon of Aglaia's hopes.

In her first consternation she believed that a malignant power was pursuing her, in order to drag her back from every prize toward which she stretched out her hands. And the blood seemed to stop in her veins, at the thought:

"Will it be the same with my share of the inheritance?"

Wild fears and plans rushed through her mind. Her father was no more to be trusted with ninety-five thousand dollars than a child: she should go to Florence and take charge of the whole sum. Or else, she should write to the American consul there. But at the word "consul," her small head with its wealth of copper-colored hair sank forward; this time her lashes veiled her emerald-green eyes in misery instead of coquetry. And her face, usually as tranquil as a pale cameo, displayed the look that it had worn one day in Florence, when Valentino Mughetto had finally washed his hands of her.

Poor Aggie! it was too bad that this last bolt should fall upon her now. She expected to be a mother in September.

That particular piece of news created a sensation in the

Pension Schwandorf. Aurelius to become a grandfather, Frossie and Thallie aunts! Mr. Goodchild, beside himself with joy, wanted to rush down-town at once and buy some linen picture-books, a silver mug, a miniature drum.

"A drum! But suppose he does n't turn out to be a boy?" Frossie inquired, laughing.

"Oh, let's hope it is n't a girl," said Thallie, with a bitter smile.

"The idea! Why not?" Mr. Goodchild retorted warmly. "What could be nicer, I should like to know?" He gathered in his own two girls for an old-fashioned hug. "Just think, my little Aggie! And I can remember when she herself was so tiny that you could hardly find her, snuggled by her mother's side!" His face changed as he continued softly: "What a thing life is, to be sure! Some are coming, some are here, and some have gone on. But just like Alpine climbers struggling up to a pinnacle with ropes around their waists, we are all bound together by invisible bands of interest, of love. Well, some day, please God! we shall all be together on the summit!"

And he raised his large eyes, full of awe, as if he already saw a beautiful young woman in a short, quaint jacket stitched with jet, in a coiffure of bygone days but with the face of Thallie, leaning down to help him up beside her on those radiant heights.

From that day he saw no picture or image of the Madonna that he did not think of Aggie. He wrote her endless letters in the dithyrambic style. For a while, he wished that the baby, if a girl, might be christened "Fiammetta," after the lovely and long-suffering heroine in his tragic poem.

He discussed this question with Mme. von Schwandorf, in the office-boudoir scented heavily with bergamot. The proprietress, immaculate in her yellow frizzes and countless

points of lace, her Florentine poodle drowsing at her side, found it hard to compose her half-sympathetic and half-shrewd old face to a polite solemnity.

In the end, she expressed a preference for the name of Magda.

"Impossible," Aurelius objected. "I've already cast the baby's horoscope — approximately — and applied it to the science of numbers. According to the neo-cabalistic theories, a name beginning with M would bring my grandchild into the direst financial straits. Why, only yesterday, Princess Tchernitza told me, 'Remember, anything but M!' But she thought very favorably of Z."

"Yes? And what, in Heaven's name, may begin with a Z?"

"Nothing has yet occurred to me except Zenobia, Zora and Zuleika," Aurelius gloomily confessed.

To keep her face straight, Mme. von Schwandorf lighted a cigarette and blew three smoke-rings.

But Giannina, the maid, strongly favored the name of Leonella. Her husband, the piratical-looking waiter Federico, objected that the child was surely going to be a boy. One night, while serving the spaghetti, he presumed to suggest to Mr. Goodchild that "Alessandro" was the thing. In a hoarse whisper he explained that he had an Alessandro for a brother: the fellow, without being able to boast a grain of common-sense, had blundered into holy orders and become a monsignore. Obviously, a man with that name could not help prospering!

Then, at last, it came to Aurelius, while he was meditating in the garden, that the naming of Aggie's baby was not his business after all. A shadow passed from his brow. With a sigh of relief he leaned back in his wicker chair to smile at the unfolding flowers.

The sunshine was bringing out the most reluctant foliage

now: the garden displayed its daintiest regalia, like the waking princess in a fairy-tale. All Florence, indeed, seemed permeated with the shy enterprise of spring. One specially inspiring afternoon Aurelius ventured to call on the Tesore.

The Hôtel des Grands Ducs, in Via de' Leoni, was a small, rattletrap asylum for the more liberal professions, a building of uncommonly precarious aspect, in the vestibule of which a rakish-looking porter with white, woolly hair sat smoking a bad cigar. Mr. Goodchild was ushered into a musty drawing-room. There, seated on the edge of a solferino-colored chair, he clutched his hat tightly for a quarter of an hour. At last a slovenly page-boy escorted him two flights upstairs, to the apartment of the International Star.

She received him as if there were a little joke between them.

Nella Tesore wore a pale-yellow negligee which appeared to be diaphanous, though it was really opaque, which pretended simplicity, although it was composed with an insidious sophistication, which, in fine, while feigning to be a sort of modern house-gown, would have suggested to any one but Mr. Goodchild the habiliments of Venusberg. Her cheeks were as white, her lips as red, her black bang as glossy, as ever. And as she stood with her unsymmetrical face upturned, smiling at him in that hospitable, generous, yet enigmatic, way, Aurelius seemed to see condensed in this one personage all the thrilling abnormality of genius.

"But 'ave a sit, Signore!"

He sank upon a sofa.

It was the sort of private parlor, once on a time as tricky as the setting of a Palais Royal farce, which has been occupied by so many artistic temperaments or naughty children that the proprietor no longer gives a thought to renovation.



"No, no, no, no, no, no! You are one of zose Ameri
meelionaires!"

[illegible]

1

The rug bore blotches from coffee-cups and ink-wells. The marble chimneypiece and the shabby piano were prodigally scratched by matches. All the chair-arms were adorned with circular stains. And here and there on the walls appeared a penciled cartoon, with some such inscription as, "Lina Valiardi, who sings like a crow." Or elsewhere one discerned the tremulous outline of a heart, confining the words "Imalda and Bruno, June 7, 1901, a happy day." But since none of the Tesore's predecessors had been giants, the high ceiling still showed, undefaced, its rather inappropriate fresco of a well-nourished lady stopping her ears against the insinuations of some cupids.

Mr. Goodchild's attention, however, was wholly taken by the International Star.

"Zo you live here in Firenze?" she asked him, soothingly.

"Yes, ma'am, in a manner of speaking."

"An' you do nozzing? You are a *signore* a *gentil-homme*, a — how zall I say? — a meester at your ease?"

"At present," Aurelius admitted, with a blush, "I'm composing some verses inspired by this fair city."

"La, la! You mus' be very reesh!"

"Well, ma'am, I should n't quite say rich. We are comfortable, my girls and I. Yes, comfortable is the word."

Letting her undulous shape lean gradually forward, she wagged her finger at him playfully.

"No, no, no, no, no, no! You are one of zose American meelionaires!"

And she laughed at him softly, with the look of a little girl peering into a confectioner's shop-window. Whereupon, since laughter is contagious, Aurelius plucked up sufficient courage to smile himself.

The west wind, entering through the open window, lifted from the piano-top some sheets of music, which fluttered over the floor. Mr. Goodchild jumped to pick up the scat-

tered scores. But in the midst of this task, struck motionless by apprehension, he blurted out the words:

"Is it possible, ma'am, that I interrupted your practicing?"

The Tesore assured him that while she had been running over some songs, his call had not interfered with anything important. It was difficult, for one who depended no less on gesture than on the voice, to rehearse without an accompanist.

"Perhaps," Aurelius ventured, "I might excuse my intrusion by being of some slight use in that respect. Mind, I don't say that my piano-playing is A1 —"

He stopped, flushed and struck dumb by his effrontery; but Nella Tesore clapped her hands together in delight.

"A musician!"

"No, really, I assure you! Yet I should consider it a great, yes, a very great honor, to be of assistance even for a moment to so fine an artist."

Forthwith the Tesore led him to the piano-stool and spread a sheet of music on the rack. As if in a dream he ran his fingers up and down the keys. Involuntarily his face expressed dismay.

"Some time would you permit me to tune this instrument?"

But she, in the middle of the room, was busy pinning up her skirts around her ankles.

"*Pronto!* All-a right! *Allegretto moderato!* One! Two!"

Straight-backed on the piano-stool, his long cutaway coat-tails hanging down behind, his patriarchal beard swaying gently to the time, Aurelius Goodchild, philosopher, gentleman, and father of a family, played the accompaniment of a song which had been crowned by the Neapolitan rifferaff in last year's competition at Piedigrotta. Behind him, Nella

Tesore, darling of the Alhambra Music Hall, postured and stepped about in the pale-yellow negligee, her silken ankles flashing, her arms revealing their statuesque whiteness to the shoulders, her red smile embracing the dilapidated chairs as if each one held an adoring, yet not unhopeful, spectator. Her full, slightly husky voice blended in a pleasant way with the tinkle of the old piano :

“ They call me now la Bella Pastorella, leri-lè,
And innocence in love is my best part, leri-lè,
When all would own a corner of my heart, leri-lè,
And say, I love you so, oh, Nina Bella, leri-lè!
Each morning as I take my way,
Lads who pass me say,
Ninetta, so divinely fair,
Tell me if I dare!
Carina, surely there must be
One little kiss in store for me? ”

Other verses followed, relating in the true Neapolitan manner the sentimental progress of *la Bella Pastorella*, and the finale left no doubt of that amiable young person's charity. The words, however, were Greek to Mr. Goodchild.

But if only he were sure enough of his accompaniment to turn his head!

The Tesore sang again — “ Life without Love is Nothing,” “ The Signorina on the Tramway,” and “ Ah, What Love will Do!” Aurelius, exalted by this collaboration with a veritable lady of the stage, displayed a virtuosity that he had not known for years. The rehearsal ending, he was more at ease than if he had paid the International Star a dozen calls.

So at last he was able to deliver the long-meditated speech in appreciation of her art.

She listened with the utmost patience to this oration,

her pliant body so luxuriously relaxed in the warm current of praise that there was about her something curiously feline; one might nearly have expected her to purr. But in the end her eyes became sad as she made the comment:

"After all! Out zere I 'ave not receive' ze joostice due me."

"America would be at your feet."

"Si?"

She weighed his words; without moving, she studied him intently; her gaze seemed to pass straight through him in secret speculation. But when he picked up his black felt hat and ebony cane, she made a gesture of astonishment.

"You go?"

"I fear I've already encroached too long on your valuable time."

An unusual smile touched her lips. Slipping her large, plump hand into his palm, she murmured, this time without dilating her near-set eyes:

"You come soon again? We zall meck ze *musica*, we zall spick of America, an' togezzer, like in ze '*Stornelli del Cuore*,' we zall bose find

*"nell' anima gemella
Un' cara ingenuità!"*

In other words, in a twin soul a rare ingenuousness.

Aurelius, descending to the street, was entranced by this last evidence of the Tesore's warm and simple womanhood.

He was impatient to relate his adventure to his daughters. But in Via Tornabuoni he encountered Fava, who, on hearing where Aurelius had been, began to look uncomfortable. After hemming and hawing, the lieutenant besought Mr. Goodchild to say nothing to any one about that visit; for since the Tesore was a vaudeville actress, such intimate acquaintance with her would be misunderstood in Florence.

"What," cried Aurelius, aghast, "the Florentines are as bigoted as that!"

Fava laid his head on one side, raised his shoulders, and pressed his eyelids together.

"Unfortunately, everybody in these parts has not reached a proper plane of thought. One judges the individual by the majority."

"But this is outrageous, sir! That good, kind woman, wrapped up in her profession!"

"The more reason why we should protect her name. Come, you will promise, at least on her account, that nobody shall know?"

Mr. Goodchild agreed to seal his lips for Mme. Tesore's sake.

So it was that Toto Fava, after yielding to a mischievous impulse, escaped the consequences which his rather cynical judgment of human nature had not been able to anticipate. Aurelius made no mention of the International Star, Camillo Olivuzzi did not quarrel with his two brother-officers, and Thallie was not informed that Fava had been playing pranks on the gentleman he hoped to make his father-in-law.

As a matter of fact, Toto Fava had now proposed to Thallie half a dozen times.

He had told her that she was killing him. He had dropped upon one knee in a secluded corner of the moonlit garden, to the detriment of his dress-trousers. He had seized her hand, had gasped out phrases in English, French, Italian, and Sicilian, had raised his unfortunate countenance toward her averted face, which appeared in the moonbeams like the visage of an angel. Yes, at such times he loved her much more than the dowry which would undoubtedly go with her. And his failure to move her inflamed him and enraged him so that he longed at one moment to lock her

up forever in a room to which he alone possessed the key, and at the next, to devour her instantly, with one big gulp. Ah, *corpo di Diana!* — ah, body of Diana — what sweet punishment should he not visit upon this lovely torturer if once she weakened!

But Thallie had no intention of weakening.

A year before, she would have reveled in such romantic scenes; to-day she wanted to avoid them. Then she would have listened with bated breath to these sentimental speeches, like one who hears at last the formula long pondered in the awe of ignorance. But now the most vibrant phrases failed to infect her with the slightest thrill, unless, as she compared them with the utterances of another on a certain night of rushing lights and sibilant darkness, she felt a tremor of rage. All alike, so poetically entreating in their speech, so hideously violent in their thoughts, so tender at first and afterward so cruel! In fine, the dream was shattered, and fate had prevented the reality from giving place to a renewal of illusion. Thallie, whose heart had throbbed so hard in expectation of love, now asked nothing better than to be left alone by men.

Sometimes, when she had composed herself to sleep, tiny pictures floated against the screen of her closed eyes. She saw Reginald Dux as she had first seen him on the boat-deck of the ship, and as he had looked that night at the Politeama Fiorentino, and as she had afterward imagined him, in a garden at Taormina, bending over a chair half hidden among Bougainvillea-flowers, to kiss the black-haired woman of the Cherbourg tender.

And the worst of it was, she knew now who the Ghilla-moors and the Duxes were, notable members of the American plutocracy, who would have regarded a union with the Goodchild family as a disaster.

"Fool that I was!" she sobbed, sitting up in bed, beating

her fists against her breast, racked by an agony of shame. "Goose! Ignoramus!"

And as Frossie, in the other bed, awoke with a start, Thallie threw herself face-down upon the pillows, to smother her weeping.

But she felt plump arms about her, soft kisses on her neck.

"O Babykins! still the same thing? Won't it get any better?"

"It's not that," gulped Thallie. "It's not love any more. Love! Ugh! It's just that I'm so disgusted with myself."

It was true; at last love had been supplanted by chagrin.

She believed that he now recalled her merely as a fatuous little thing of vast presumption. How she longed to give him a different idea of her! If only she could realize her old expectations of fame, force the world to respect her as a genius, make Reginald admit some day, "By George! I was mistaken in that girl!"

She resumed her painting with a feverish energy.

The theories of the Post-Impressionists now obsessed her. She had read, in an article by Picabia, "The musician's studies are from his brain and soul; my studies are from my brain and soul. Painting nature as it is is not art, but mechanical genius. The old masters turned out by hand the most faithful copies of what they saw; but we have outgrown all that. Their paintings are to us what the alphabet is to the child." To Thallie,—who at least in respect of art was a true daughter of these restless times,—such words were like a trumpet-call. She determined henceforth to paint emotionally only, like Matisse, who said, "It makes no difference what the proportions are, so long as there is feeling."

All her hours with M. Alphonse Zolande were that much time thrown away: to inquire into all those obsolete methods had been absurd. Art was alive, and life was continually changing; away with the paintings of the past, as little related to present-day humanity as the fossil-bones of dinosaurs! The true genius of the twentieth century should express naïvely his uncontaminated soul!

So Thallie strove to express herself naïvely. And, to her great satisfaction, it was soon impossible to find in her canvases a trace of Titian's, Ingres's, Manet's, or any other old foggy's influence. As for that, nobody in the Pension Schwandorf had ever seen such pictures.

Frossie, her own work finished for the day, often paused before Thallie's easel in amazement. With a troubled smile she would ask:

"What is that meant to be?"

"A flower-girl that I studied on the Ponte Vecchio."

"But you never saw those colors!"

"What of that, if they express my emotions in regard to her?"

"Her head is completely out of drawing."

"Intentionally so. It is n't the head of her body, but of her personality, as I perceived it."

Frossie shrugged, a trick that she had caught from Camillo Olivuzzi.

"I do wish, Thallie, that you'd go back to your old style!"

"You mean the style of the past? Not I! As Kandinsky says, 'Every real work of art must be the child of its own times!'"

Erect in her painty gingham apron, the gay palette on her arm, the brush clenched in her hand, she suggested a fair Amazon armed for an esthetic fray, a sort of studio Jeanne d'Arc defying all conventions for an ideal. But

when her sky-blue eyes were filled with that visionary light, when her cheeks, round which the auburn curls had tumbled down, showed their old-time rosiness, she seemed once more so young, so full of youth's bravado, that her sister did not have the heart to argue with her.

"All right, Lovins," said Frossie. "No matter if an old stupid like me does n't quite see it yet. In the meantime, a walk might be good for both of us."

So they would sally forth to walk through medieval streets, across the Arno, and sometimes even in Cascine Park. At last Thallie had given up trying to avoid that spot.

Camillo often accompanied them on their promenades. Passing strangers looked with interest at that trio, the two foreign girls tripping in their dainty spring dresses, the cavalry lieutenant pacing beside them happily.

In the Cascine they traversed a long avenue of trees, a race-course on the right, a meadow with hurdles and ditches on the left. They reached an open space bright with formal flower-beds, beyond which extended prospects tempting in their shade. Along bypaths screened in with glossy foliage, where a thicket here and there afforded background for a statue, the sunshine scantily mottled the lava-like corrugations of the walks; the air was cool and damp, and from around large hummocks of moss there rose the delicious exhalation of moist earth. In the branch overhead a bird broke the hush with a melodious call.

And there was a place, where two ilex-trees stood far apart, from which one could view the northern hills. They stood, so Thallie thought, arrayed in gold and purple like Etruscan kings, studded with tiny white hamlets that resembled ornaments of pearl. And veils of rich air, impregnated with sunlight, softened that distant spectacle till it assumed the vagueness of an exquisite hallucination, till

it seemed to express the very spirit of a region which had cast a spell of beauty over all the world.

Here was the perfect subject for a Post-Impressionist picture!

Thallie sat down upon a marble bench to fill her eye with the color of that view. Frossie and Camillo strolled on; it was the chance for which they had been waiting. As the hedges concealed them, their hands touched, their fingers twined together; they walked in silence, with faces upturned toward the tree-tops, where the birds were warbling.

The world was such a sunny, fragrant, peaceful place; life was so full of happiness! Just to live, just to tread these flowery alleys, was almost too keen a pleasure. With an unsteady laugh, Frossie murmured:

"If the future holds anything much better, I'm afraid I sha'n't be able to bear it."

"You'll find that it does, *Carissima*," he answered, squeezing her hand. "Also, you will be able to bear it."

And as they strolled farther into the green labyrinth, they contemplated that future as serenely as if they knew all its secrets and had found all beneficent.

He told her that at last he had written to his father, who would presently arrive to make the formal call on Mr. Goodchild. But, as Camillo had declared for a June wedding, the old count would not be likely to appear just yet, because of the expense of staying on in Florence till the ceremony. Still, he might possibly be tempted into such extravagance in order to see Camillo win his military brevet. The aviation trials were scheduled to take place within the week.

"And I wish they were over," was Frossie's comment at this point.

"But I'm quite sure to pass," Camillo protested. "Everything that's required I have done many times."

THE HIGHEST BREVET

"But if anything went wrong!"

He stopped and faced her.

"Look at me," he said. "Do I resemble a man who cannot take care of himself?"

His winning smile, his lustrous, almost romantic, his creamy pallor that many an Italian woman would have envied, did not detract from the native vigor of his body, under the smooth blue-black jacket with red facings, expressed a graceful and indefatigable force and latent muscular energy as one observes in panther in deed, his whole personality seemed so alert and conscious, so replete with co-ordinate intelligence and strength, it was impossible to imagine him vanquished in a contest with any man or horse or refractory machine.

"I suppose I am foolish to worry."

"Yes, it is folly to doubt for a moment. Life is too much."

They came to a spot where the foliage was dense on the side and overhead, where a low bough still swayed from the leap of a departed bird, where a sound of running water rose scarcely louder than the beating of their hearts. Millo told her:

"Some day when we visit my old home you and I will hear all through the night that sound of water which comes over the rocks far below our open window."

Then he was impelled to tell her more about his life in the hills of the Abruzzi. He spoke of emotions that came to him in the solitude of wild ravines, or on a mountain peak at dawn, or in the starlight, when he leaned against the crumbling wall of the Olivuzzi fortress, to watch the torrent wind like a silvery path toward the unknown. It was then, when in less ardent countries youths of his age were still occupied with adolescent thoughts, that the sires of his maturity had been prefigured. The id

risen before him, half martial and half amorous: the shadow of rugged parapets had embraced the contours of the fertile earth, which floated, pale and palpitant, in the soft air.

"And even then I think I saw your face!"

"Why not? Maybe it was n't only a foreshadowing, but also a recollection?"

"You really believe in those ideas?"

"Who knows? At any rate, if the past is closed the future is open."

"The future, at last so near! But its very nearness makes waiting all the harder. Perhaps Carducci felt as I do at this moment, when he sang, in his 'Mattinata,'

"De' nidi a i verdi boschi ecco il richiamo —
Il tempo torna: amiamo, amiamo, amiamo —
E il sospir de le tombe rinfiorate —
Il tempo passa: amate, amate, amate."

Verses which Frossie, long afterward, could only render into English thus:

From nests to budding branches, hark! soft notes and clear:
Come, let us love, love, love, for spring is here!
The breath of tombs sways new, bright blossoms spread above:
See, spring will pass, so let us love, love, love!

But the last two lines, with their suggestion of mortality, chilled her. For a moment the sunlight seemed to fade, the birds to combine their limpid tones into a threnody.

"What's this?" asked Camillo, smiling. "You don't like that sentiment?"

His eyes reassured her, full as they were of confidence and tenderness, so vital that it seemed as if they could never cease to glow. She replied:

"Here is something just as appropriate, without any mention of tombs." And she uttered the lines:

"How eloquent are eyes!
Not music's most impassioned note
On which life's warmest fervours float
Like them bids raptures rise!"

"Eh," he assented, "that is good, too. Who made it?"

"Shelley."

"That is n't all of it?"

Gazing at him through the pince-nez that they had both forgotten, she went on:

"Love, look thus again,—
That your love may lighten a waste of years,
Darting the beam that conquers cares,
Through the cold shower of tears.
Love, look thus again!"

But her voice failed; even the verses of her own choice ended in a minor key. Slipping her arms around his neck, she pressed against his breast, against the scraps of ribbon which were his reward for braving death in Tripoli.

"Camillo!"

"What is it, dear?"

"I don't know."

Laughing, he kissed her on the cheek. Her eyes still clouded by uneasiness, she breathed almost fiercely:

"No! To-day I want you to kiss me really and truly."

It was a request still foreign to Italian courtship: the air of Italy is reputed to assist in noteworthy combustions at that special contact. Camillo hesitated, then gallantly did as she had asked. It seemed that there was some sense in that old superstition! She said:

"Let us go back."

They rejoined Sister Thallie. The rest of that walk was silent.

At night, long after the last trumpet-call had sounded,

the remembrance of his afternoon with Frossie came between Camillo and his study: the problem in meteorology was confused by the recollection of a kiss. Putting his charts aside, he stared out at the barrack-square, where the dormitory windows gave forth a feeble light. All was silent, except for the footfalls of a sentry who paced between the horse-troughs.

Was she asleep?

He looked round his small, white room, as simply furnished as a monastery cell. The details of that chamber melted before his eyes; he perceived another place, simple also, enriched, however, with objects of feminine significance, where even at an hour like this he and she would be together. Then he jumped up to pace the floor, angry at time that moved so leisurely, beside himself with a desire to rush out through the city to the Pension Schwandorf, and bring her to the window with a call, and cry through the odorous darkness, "Let it be now; for this is May, and who could possibly wait till June?"

But for the most part his Latin impetuosity was held in check by a true soldier's stoicism. And finally at least one long-awaited morning dawned—the day of the aviation trials.

Through the influence of Campoformio and Camillo's colonel, the tests were permitted on the baron's flying-field. Bright and early a military examiner, with two aides to mark the distance-flights, arrived at the Villa Campoformio. The sky was cloudless; the breeze blew gently; everything seemed auspicious. Camillo, riding out with Fava, Azeglio, and several other officers of the Magenta Cavalry, was confident of success.

Outside the hangars, the Maurice Farman biplane stood glistening in the sun. Without waiting so much as to unhook his sword, Camillo examined the machine all over.

The Renault engine had been completely taken down, cleaned, reërected; the cast-iron cylinder-heads were new; in front of the cylinders a more powerful fan had been installed. But a Chauvière "*intégrale*" propeller ordered from Paris had not arrived.

"What's the matter with this propeller?" inquired Toto Fava.

Camillo, running his hand down one of the walnut blades, replied in an undertone:

"If you look close, you'll see a little crack in the wood. We noticed it some time ago. To be sure, it's no bigger than at first, for all the flying that we've done. But I should n't like the blade to break this morning."

"Or any other morning," Fava ejaculated in dismay. "Capers! In such a case you might fall?"

"Oh, no doubt, if I allowed her to run on, the machine would tilt, the engine would be torn loose from the fuselage, and everything would go to pieces. But I assure you, the moment the blade broke up, I'd simply cut off the engine and plane down. The only trouble is, my trials would be interrupted."

"But I see another aëroplane in there. Use that propeller."

"Impossible to change."

And Camillo explained that the other machine, a monoplane, was furnished with a Gnôme engine which, like its propeller, made twelve hundred revolutions a minute. On the other hand, the propeller of the biplane, being larger, made nine hundred revolutions, or only half as many as its Renault engine. In consequence, the gyrative action of the biplane was negligible.

Fava, pulling at his rat-tail mustaches, squinted more hideously than ever at these details.

"Well," he exclaimed at last, "I am a horseman, not a

bird. All the same, Camillino, I should drive the monoplane to-day."

"No, I'll stick to this old wagon, which has never failed me yet."

Slapping his comrade on the back, Camillo went briskly to put on his flying-suit.

Just as he reappeared, accoutred for the air, the Goodchilds drove up in a barouche; to-day the baron's motor-car was at the service of the examiner and his aides. In courtly fashion Aurelius assisted his daughters to alight. Their white linen frocks were instantly hemmed in by the uniforms of the Magenta Cavalry. But Frossie, glancing between the military caps, sought Camillo with an anxious eye.

As soon as she could speak to him apart, she asked:

"You're sure you feel quite well?"

"But when did I ever feel otherwise?"

"I hardly slept a wink all night."

"Come, now, a soldier's bride, and worried by a thing like this! Look at the others, how jolly they all are. One could almost call it a festa."

The flying-field had taken on a gay appearance. Near the biplane sword-scabbards flashed; Thallie's flowered hat kept turning from one direction to another; Mr. Goodchild's moistened finger was raised to test the wind. Behind the hangars browsed the sleek horses of the officers, attended by a group of orderlies. Beyond the fences peasants from near-by farms were gathering in crowds.

Down from the villa two of the baron's servants came bearing a hamper of refreshments. A burst of laughter resounded. A fox-terrier, which had followed one of the lieutenants from the barracks, began to bark and run around in circles.

At last the examiner made a sign; the spectators scat-

tered; mechanics in overalls approached the aëroplane. Camillo climbed into the driver's seat. Motionless, alert, gloved hands on the throttle and the control, he appeared in his helmet and goggles scarcely human, like a part of the machine that pent him in, a Frankenstein whose members were the great wings, whose nerves were the complicated rods and wires. All stood silent in the face of this phenomenon.

"Go!"

The engine roared. The propeller became a shining disk. The biplane skimmed the ground and rose into the air. The fox-terrier returned panting from his vain pursuit.

One saw the machine diminishing rapidly, like a gray bird, a hand's breadth, as it seemed, above the western horizon. Soon one could scarcely discern it through the dazzling air. At last, when it had become invisible, all poses were relaxed; the spectators began to chatter:

"How fast he flies!"

"When can we expect him back?"

"Where shall we look to see him returning?"

This first test was a triangular distance-flight. There was nothing to do but be patient.

Yet all those present, except perhaps the military examiner, showed a certain nervous tension. Baron di Campoformio, his hands tightly clasped behind his back, wore a travesty of his customary hospitable smile. Fava, for once oblivious to Thallie, paced to and fro some distance from the rest, his neck bent, a Toscano clenched between his teeth. Mr. Goodchild drifted about with watch in hand, as if everything depended on the movement of that bulbous time-piece.

Frossie, afflicted with a growing weakness, had gone to sit in the barouche. There the baron joined her. They raised their eyes above the western sky-line.

"You are pale," he said presently. "May I fetch you a glass of wine?"

Without lowering her gaze, she made a gesture of refusal. But soon the words escaped her:

"Up there, all alone, separated from the earth, invisible! What folly it is, after all! Men were never meant to do that."

"Courage! It is not really dangerous any more."

"It is folly," she repeated sharply; "it is wicked folly! Men were never meant to be tempted into such danger." And she gave Campoformio a sick look, full of resentment.

Averting his head, he stared with a pained expression at the ground.

Mr. Goodchild came slowly toward the barouche, as if walking in his sleep. After patting Frossie's arm in an absent-minded way, he inquired of the baron, with extraordinary earnestness:

"Excuse me, sir, but have you the correct time? I set my watch this morning by the campanile bells, but possibly—"

A rattle of china reached their ears: on a long wooden table near the hangars the two servants were setting out plates and bottles. The rest of the company began to brighten at this sound. The young officers, in an access of appetency, lighted fresh cigarettes. Those surrounding Thallie began to make jokes. But Thallie, urged by an uneasiness that had nothing to do with aviation, turned to look behind her. There, watching her inscrutably, stood the baron's chauffeur, Antonio.

At that moment some one shouted:

"Here he comes!"

And they saw a tiny speck floating in the southwestern sky.

"It is he, sure enough!"

"So soon!"

"He must be breaking a record!"

Already one could perceive the breadth of the machine, a hovering gray flake of exceeding thinness, which, without seeming to advance, grew clearer every second. From the fences round about a muffled cheer went up.

But the fox-terrier, bounding over the grass, pounced upon something with a snarl. His eyes glaring, his muzzle wrinkled with ferocity, he shook his head from side to side.

"He has caught a field-mouse!"

The words were repeated, with laughter and applause, by the officers, the mechanics, the orderlies:

"Brave doggie! He has caught a field-mouse!"

For the moment, all, with one exception, looked in amusement or disgust at this tragedy in miniature.

Suddenly a scream rent the air, shrill, prolonged, blood-curdling. In the barouche Frossie was standing bolt-upright as if frozen stiff, her eyes, enormously dilated, fixed on the western void.

The sky was empty.

There followed an instant of stupefaction.

"Where is he?"

"He has planed down?"

"An accident?"

The dreadful cry rose again, but now articulate:

"I saw him fall!"

Round the hangars broke loose a babble of shouts, a trampling of horses, the clash of spurs and scabbards. The officers, scrambling into the saddle, were off breakneck across the turf, putting their mounts to the fences, scattering over the fields. Along a road roared the baron's motor-car, leaving behind it a long trail of dust. Last of all went running the mechanics, the servants, the peasants, young and

old — all frantically striving toward the scene of the disaster, which was miles away.

Only Thallie and Mr. Goodchild remained with Frossie.

She lay on the cushions of the barouche, as white as death, her eyes half-closed, her body shaken by a chill. "Take me to him!" she moaned from time to time, as if delirious; but this they were afraid to do. Finally a lieutenant on a lathered horse arrived at a gallop with the news. Camillo had fallen far beyond Peretola. He was not dead, but a physician from a neighboring hamlet had said that he could not possibly recover. A priest had already administered the *Santissimo*.

While the young man was speaking, a cart drove into the flying-field with the new propeller from Paris.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

A SCENT OF DYING FLOWERS, MELTING WAX, AND DUST

THE moment he learned that Camillo Olivuzzi was still alive, Mr. Goodchild ordered the coachman to drive at full speed to the place where the *aéroplane* had fallen. They had not gone far, however, when they met a mechanic returning on a borrowed bicycle. The man told them that Camillo had already been taken to the military hospital in Florence.

So the barouche went racketing toward the city.

Frossie stared straight ahead. She was unaware of Thallie's arm about her, of Mr. Goodchild's broken utterances, of the warning cries that rose from the wayside. Her soul had rushed on, was now striving to mingle once more with the soul of Camillo.

"Faster!" shouted Aurelius.

Once more the coachman railed at his horses and laid on the whip. The bony hacks, extended like a runaway team, raced through the suburbs.

Mr. Goodchild groaned:

"If I had started in the first place, we should be with him now! But I was afraid! I wanted to spare you!"

She did not hear him.

The barouche careened through the broad Viale Principessa Margherita and into Via Cavour. The goal came in view, a long building set opposite a little park. Before the gate stood Campoformio's motor-car and half a dozen cavalry horses. The noon sunshine gilded the threshold, worn smooth by the passage of much pain and grief.

They found themselves in a cool, white, stone-paved vesti-

bule, trying to evade the extended arms of a door-porter. A surgeon, clad in duck, came forward protesting. At that moment there passed in quickly, behind their backs, an elderly man, smooth-shaven, in a peculiar uniform — the chaplain of the Magenta Cavalry. Then they saw, in a corner of the vestibule, a young officer sitting on a stool, his cap on the pavement, his face buried in his hands. It was Toto Fava.

Mr. Goodchild, escaping the door-porter, ran to the lieutenant.

"Fava! For goodness' sake, sir, speak to these people! Make them let us pass!"

Toto Fava slowly raised a countenance the color of clay. A sigh issued from his throat.

"No use. The doctors are busy. None of us can see him now."

"But it is for Frossie! Surely they won't keep Frossie from him!"

Fava looked up at Aurelius in vague amazement.

"But they keep me out, too, Signore. I, who was his classmate at Modena, at Pinerolo, at Tor di Quinto, who have loved him for many years! I have shared his mess and his tent, his joys and sorrows; we have had one purse and one heart, and now I am not allowed to touch his hand. They say it makes too many in the room!"

His squinting eyes grew moist, and suddenly a tear ran down his bony visage on each side of his rat-tail mustaches. But he spoke so quietly, there was in his voice so simple a tenderness, that a hush descended over all of them. And even Frossie, leaning on Thallie's shoulder, bowed her head as if listening to the words of eulogy that are spoken over a tomb when he went on:

"Think of it! He has always been the best of us. His sword was not brighter than his honor; there was about him

something that we others did not have — something strong and sweet, like the breath of the clean mountains. And so I say, Why should it have come to him? Why should it not have been I, who am not worth his little finger? But no; it must be the good one, while the idler, the waster, the buffoon, is left to grow old. That is how our famous Heaven manages the earth! Ah! ah! Do I not understand to-day the feelings of that poor Rinaldeschi, who threw mud at the fresco of the Annunciation long ago in Via del Corso!"

And he began to swear softly and ferociously, glaring before him, quivering all over with a sacrilegious fury. But soon, realizing that there were ladies present, he stopped, and rose to his feet. His cheek-bones smeared with tears, he went to Frossie, supported her to a bench that stood against the wall, and, when he had seated her, reverently kissed her hand, as though she were Camillo's wife.

Even at this unexpected homage, she was not able to weep.

For a long while she sat there, her back against the cold wall of stucco, her feet on the cold stone pavement, till her limbs seemed permeated with the chill of death. The door-porter, a wizen veteran who wore the Garibaldi medal, gazed at her with the expression of an aged dog that wishes to display his sympathy. At the end of a long, bleak corridor one saw Azeglio and some other lieutenants pacing back and forth.

Out in the street sounded a beat of hoofs; there crossed the bright threshold a distinguished-looking officer with gray mustaches, at sight of whom Toto Fava clapped his heels together and saluted. For a while the newcomer conversed with Toto gravely, then cast at Frossie a glance of pity, touched his cap, departed. He was Camillo's colonel, the Marchese delle Banderosse.

At length Azeglio came and whispered to Fava. All followed him through the corridor to a dim room, smelling of iodoform, where several persons were standing round a bed. Frossie sank down, leaned close, pierced the gloom with a poignant look. But the shadowy head on the pillow did not move.

A physician whispered in her ear that Camillo, because of his unusual vitality, would probably live till the arrival of his parents from the Abruzzi.

They lifted her up and gave her into Mr. Goodchild's charge. As Aurelius led her to the door, she passed close to one who turned his face away. She recognized the old shooting-coat of Baron di Campoformio.

Outside the sick-room she became aware that somebody was kneeling before her, kissing her skirt, and sobbing; she saw at her feet, through a black mist, a man in a private's uniform, with the appearance of a peasant.

"Pray for him, Signorina! Pray for him!"

"Who is this?" she cried out, recoiling with a convulsive shudder.

In a hoarse voice the fellow answered:

"You don't recognize me, Signorina? Why, I am his orderly! Many a time I held his horse at your door. It is I who was to serve you when you were married."

All down the corridor the sobs followed her:

"Pray for him, Signorina!"

Afterward she remembered begging them to let her stay in the hospital; surely there was some little corner where she might wait until the end? But she seemed so weak, and looked so strange, that the doctors objected to this course. Aurelius took her back for the present to the Pension Schwandorf. The news of any alteration for the worse was to be telephoned immediately.

Her bedroom seemed odd, like the room of another per-

son sure of a happy fate. She felt, indeed, confused in regard to her identity: how could it be she upon whom this tragedy had descended? When finally they left her alone as she desired, she rose, went to the mirror, scrutinized her reflected features, and said: "Who are you? What wrong have you done to deserve this?" The face in the mirror, extremely pale, so ravaged by these few hours that it seemed the countenance of an unknown, returned her look inscrutably. She reflected, "Perhaps I'm losing my mind?"

How tired she was! Dropping down again upon the bed, she stared at the painted griffins, harpies, and mermaids which composed the decoration of the ceiling. Every figure recalled some thought that had come to her while lying on this bed, when the morning sunshine crept through the shutters to herald another day of joyous expectations.

She felt her heart pulsating slowly, even steadily. She laid a hand against her breast and wondered: "Why should it go on beating? Does n't it know that everything is over, that my life is finished?" And presently, "I must have a black dress." And after a longer period of torpor: "Violets were his favorite flower. But how shall I get violets late in May? They must be all gone, every one." She was scarcely suffering now; her mind was numb. Nature often provides for the victim of a great mental shock such an anesthetic as was stupefying Frossie.

A breeze stole in through the window. She seemed to float half-disembodied in the perfume of the garden.

"E il sospir de le tombe rinfiorate."

At least, that afternoon in the Cascine he had pressed one kiss upon her lips.

But as the sun declined, this lethargy wore off; her senses awoke to the nightmare of reality. He was there, on the

point of leaving her, perhaps already gone, and she not with him! How could they have been so cruel as to trick her into this desertion! Struggling to her feet, she perceived that she was not alone: Mr. Goodchild and Thallie rose quickly from the chairs covered with butterflies and monkeys.

"What is it, dear?"

"I am going to him now!" And when they protested, she wailed, in a voice that they had never heard before, "Get me a cab, or I'll run all the way through the streets!"

Aurelius implored her:

"My little girl, you don't know your condition! At any rate, drink this bromid of potassium—"

"Ah, my God!"

She pushed past him. There was nothing for the others to do but follow. In the cab Thallie drew a scarf around her sister's bare head—the same scarf that Frossie had once used to see what sort of bridal-veil best suited her. Mr. Goodchild, on the folding-seat, still clutched in his hand the tumbler half full of potassium bromid.

They regained the hospital.

This time they were ushered into an anteroom furnished with some wooden chairs and an uncomfortable-looking leather couch, on which the surgeon in charge advised Frossie to lie down. It would be impossible, he said, to see Camillo at present. The patient was still unconscious; to disturb him might be immediately fatal. Aurelius pleaded that Frossie only wanted to sit beside the bed in silence. But the surgeon, after glancing at her again, clicked his tongue by way of polite refusal.

"Later," he promised, "when the signorina is in a calmer state of mind."

Somehow Aurelius had got hold of a time-table. Running his finger along the lines of type, he murmured:

The telegram must have been delivered hours ago. If caught the three o'clock train —"

at the time-table shook in his hand so that he could no longer read it.

Shadows crept into the anteroom: dusk was falling on this that had been longer than a century. The old door-keeper brought in a lighted lamp, and, carefully lifting up his feet, withdrew with a sigh. Out of doors, young men came, singing, from their work, gay, brisk, assured of many years of vigor.

Those in the anteroom became aware that the surgeon was coming before them.

He is conscious. I see no reason to hope that his patient can arrive in time. Signorina, I am not going to keep from him any longer. Perhaps you would like to see him alone for a few moments? Then for the present I ask you, Signore, and the other young lady, to wait. Give yourself the trouble to come with me, Signorina."

Again she passed through the long corridor. She reëntered the sickroom.

Amillo was stretched on his back, the coverlet pulled up to his chin, his head turned toward the door. In his countenance, unscarred, but curiously emaciated, and whiter than the pillow, his large, dark eyes, wide-open, burned with desperate anxiety. But when he perceived that it was the one who had come to him, his look changed; the lines about his brow relaxed, on his ashen lips appeared the semblance of a smile.

Now her face leaned close to his; his eyes expressed something more awesome than an earthly ardor; their breath mingled as the almost inaudible utterance was exchanged: "Once more!"

And she pressed on his half-open mouth the second kiss,

which evoked, in the midst of their dolor, a thousand whirling scenes of bliss that they were never to attain.

"My Camillo! My Camillo!"

She wrapped her hands around his head; she kissed him again and again, with a frantic greediness that strove to wrest from Death enough sweet agony to last a lifetime. Her breath entered his throat: she wanted to inform his shattered body with all that was vital in her, so that he might live and she die, or, at least, so that he, in passing on, might take something of her with him. Then she fastened her mouth to his as if in that way she could keep his spirit from escaping. But soon, raising her head, she cast upward a glare of wild defiance, ready to match her love against those great invisible forces that were loosening his mortal bonds. She encountered the eyes of another.

Beyond the bed a nun was sitting, coiffed in white linen, a prayer-book in her hands. The restricted oval of that face divulged a puerile beauty wherein worldly experience had left no mark; one saw the features of a congenital devotee, who had made contact with the violent passions only in such hours as this. Now, however, one surprised in her a look more complex than pitying, more subtle than remonstrative — a look of rapt, frightened speculation, as who should dare to say, "This that I see is terrible, yet is it nothing more?" But the pale young nun was no sooner aware of Frossie's gaze than she averted her eyes dilated with that forbidden wonderment. And before the other could have read her thoughts, her lips, which trembled slightly, were once more forming the phrases of the prayer-book.

To Frossie this witness of her anguish hardly seemed like an intruder: the nun's garb and attitude bestowed on her something of the impersonality of an hieratic image. Indeed, for an instant it was hard to regard her as a woman, what with the traditional attitude of mind which set her

apart no less than did her sacred garments. But the next moment Frossie found a melancholy resemblance between the nursing sister and herself. For Frossie believed that she, too, was destined to contemplate forever the emptiness of earthly hopes, to grow old impatient for delivery from life, and, above all, to know the wan exultations of celibacy.

Smoothing from Camillo's brow the crisp, black curls, she whispered:

"I want you to know that there will never be another! I swear to you that these kisses are the last!"

His voice, as if coming, by a miracle, from far away, responded:

"No, you are young."

"I have always been yours. I will be yours forever. There are not two loves like this in life."

"You are young. I make you free. I want you to be happy."

"I shall never be happy again."

All his remaining strength seemed to permeate his voice as he replied, louder than before:

"How can I go with that thought? I have brought you so much misery when I meant only happiness! I must think that some time it may be repaired. A little home, an honest man, good children — you were made for that. I am not jealous. I am past such things. There is nothing left in me now but love and anxiety for you."

As a result of this speech his forehead was beaded with sweat. The light in his eyes seemed to flicker and grow dim, till she cried in breaking accents:

"I will come to you as I am!"

"Yes," he panted, "let us hope for that meeting. But, after all, who knows what lies over there? Perhaps I can believe, if you will hold my hand. Ah, I forgot —"

And he cast a blind glance downward toward his body, inert, seemingly diminished beneath the coverlet, shrouded to the shoulders.

"Poor Campoformio! Do not blame him." Presently, lifting his eyelids, he went on more rapidly: "I telephoned to the railroad station; they said it had not arrived. But mama will bring it. She must hurry, though, for I'm going to confer with the king. Hark! Is that he already? Turn out, the whole platoon! *Plotone, presentat' arm!* Trumpeters, the royal fanfare! His Majesty is coming with my brevet!"

The nun rose to her feet. Camillo's roving stare was arrested by her white coif. He said gently:

"What are you doing here, Sister? You ought to be back in the field-ambulance. Here the bullets are as thick as bees. Aim lower, *ragazzi!* A carbine is n't a telescope; there are no Arabs in the moon! Ha! There it goes at last: saddles and lances! Now, then! *Avanti! Savoia!*"

The nun went quickly to the door and called the surgeon. Frossie turned Camillo's head between her hands, so that his wandering gaze might rest on her. His glistening visage softened at her touch. He murmured:

"As late as that? We have been happy enough for one time, is it not so? Now, dear, let us go to sleep."

His eyes closed. His breathing was almost imperceptible.

The physician remained aloof, leaning against the doorpost. The nun, kneeling down on the stone pavement, repeated the prayers for the dying. There entered through a window, from the darkness, the faint hubbub of the city. Near at hand, a confused, pervasive rustling swelled forth, the sound of many branches swaying in the evening breeze, like the rumor of innumerable softly moving wings. After a while, from the artillery-barracks to the west, came faintly

a bugle-call; the *ritirata*. But even at this sound Camillo did not stir.

So finally Frossie gave the last kiss of all, a kiss so long, so clinging, so full of the agony of loneliness, that Camillo, wherever he had gone, must certainly have felt it.

All that night and all the next day she lived in a daze. Faces appeared and disappeared before her; voices whispered, "If only she would cry!" They brought her food, which she refused, and visiting-cards. She read the names, "Tenente Benevenuto Fava, Cavalleria di Magenta; Tenente Ruggero Azeglio, Cavalleria di Magenta; Colonnello delle Banderosse, Cavalleria di Magenta," and so on. But when she saw the card marked with a baron's coronet and inscribed, "Di Campoformio," she slowly tore up the bristol and let the fragments flutter to the floor.

The old Count and Countess Olivuzzi had arrived in Florence. Aurelius asked Frossie if she could bear to meet Camillo's mother.

"Is it necessary?" she asked. "Can't I see her at the funeral?"

Aurelius told her that there was to be a military service in the Duomo, and afterward a cortège through the city to the cemetery; but among the Italian nobility it was not the custom for ladies to attend such obsequies.

Frossie pondered this information for a while.

"So they want to shut us out from that? But the man who killed him will be present, I suppose?" Soon she asked, "Is his mother with him now?"

"Yes, poor woman!"

"Then I won't disturb her. I had him living; I ought to let her have him dead. Besides, he is not there."

The second night, also, Frossie scarcely slept. The dawn found her at the window, listening for the campanile bells. There she suffered a collapse; for Thallie, waking, found

her huddled in her night-dress on the red tiles. Reviving, she asked for her slippers and a kimono, so that she could go to him at once. They put her to bed and sent for a physician. When the latter had gone, she asked :

"Did you send the flowers?"

After that she seemed to doze.

But when Mr. Goodchild had been absent for an hour, suddenly she sat up in bed, alert, staring at Thallie.

"Listen!"

She had heard the faint tolling of the bells.

"Come, help me to dress. I am going to the church."

"O Frossie! You heard what dad said!"

"What are rules of etiquette to me?"

Ten minutes later she was on her way to the Duomo in a cab.

She wore the new black dress, the toque adorned with crêpe. She had failed to notice that this costume, chosen at random while the errand-girl stood waiting, was of a complicated style, more suitable for a young widow in whom grief had not altogether vanquished coquetry. Indeed, in these fashionable weeds, their sable hue in striking contrast with her bright red hair, she excited more public notice than she had ever received before. But those who paused on the footpath to stare soon saw the true record of her bereavement imprinted on her face, which seemed to contain the stony sorrow of all the women who had ever sacrificed their loved ones on the altar of Mars.

The bells were still tolling when the cab reached the center of the city. But suddenly the coachman reined in his horse. Down the street, from the direction of the Duomo, was wafted a muffled blare, the sound of a military band.

The cortège had already left the church.

There came scuffling along the roadway a herd of shabby men and children in advance of the procession. Behind

them followed the band of the Magenta Cavalry, afoot, playing the funeral march. The notes of the horns rose high, then sank to a profound vibration through which one heard the pathos of flutes and the despondent thud of drums. Again the brass instruments emitted their melodious wail, as if expressing an irremediable sadness. And that measured rhythm was emphasized by the tread of many feet in unison, as ranks of dismounted troopers, swaying from side to side, passed slowly by.

Now the music was mingled with a gabble of voices: brown monks came dragging their sandaled feet and voicing responsive prayers. Each held in his hand a wax torch; the inky smoke, caught up from the fat flames, was swiftly dispelled. On high a silver crucifix flashed in a shredding cloud of incense.

The Florentines, packed on the footpaths, began to doff their hats; the catafalque appeared, its tall canopy of black velvet oscillating, the silver fringes quivering. In front paced an elderly, smooth-shaven man in a black three-cornered hat, a short black apron, and black knee-breeches and stockings. He was the regimental chaplain.

The catafalque was passing. At the four corners, where slender pillars, wound with silver, ascended to the canopy, the curtains of velvet were gathered in, so that the interior might be revealed. There, rising from a mass of fading flowers, an oblong bulk showed its outline through a velvet pall, on the top of which lay a long, straight sword and a lancer's brass helmet, high-crested, bearing across its front the cross of Savoy.

Behind the catafalque, in advance of still more troops, came walking at random many men in uniform and civilian dress: Toto Fava, Azeglio, and others of the Cavalry of Magenta, Campoformio in a black coat, his thin hair blown about. But in the place of honor two went arm-in-arm,

their uncovered heads bowed forward — Aurelius and a thick-set gentleman with white mustaches brushed straight up from his lips, who stared into space like an old lion that has received his death-blow.

But Frossie, leaning from the cab, still peered after the departing catafalque, in which the brass helmet glimmered amid the smoke of incense. A low cry burst from her:

“I can’t even see my flowers! I left my glasses at home!”

And at last she began to weep. And she continued to weep when the cortège had passed into a haze of dust, and all the while that the cab was bearing her back through the city to the Pension Schwandorf.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

A HEART INHABITED BY PURE MEMORIES IS NOT IN DANGER

WHEN one who was much loved has passed away, there often follows for the bereaved some periods of incredulity, as if the tragic fact might presently be proved a dream. Thus it was with Frossie after the funeral of Camillo Olivuzzi.

He had been so rich in vital energy, so serenely confident of happiness, that at times it was hard to think of him as vanquished. Surely such strength and courage and tenderness had not been banished from the earth? Sometimes, as the hours came round when he had been accustomed to appear, she found herself growing tense with an irrational expectancy. Perhaps in another moment she should see him approaching with his quick, lithe step, smiling as on that afternoon in the Cascine when he had told her, "It is folly to doubt for an instant." Ah, how passionately she should then throw herself into his arms, cling to his dear body, and cry, "I have had a dreadful hallucination; yet I felt all the while that it could not be true; the future owes us too much."

But those trysting-hours passed. Once more night let down upon the world its mourning-veils.

Then she wanted to die, in order to be with him; but how could she be sure of finding him in that illimitable beyond? Musing on man's diverse theories concerning the hereafter, she strove to find some conception of a future life that would assure her not only of rejoining him, but also of sharing with him the ecstasies out of which they had been

cheated here. All reasonable hypotheses that occurred to her, however, denied the hope of anything like physical continuation: the heavens of Christians, Buddhists and theosophists unrolled before her their vast spaces, full of disembodied souls incapable even of a kiss. And against the seraphic intercourse of such regions,— which she, still palpitating with a bride's anticipations, could not esteem,— appeared, as an alternative, the Paradise of Mahomet flooded with theatrical voluptuousness, a grotesque mockery.

For the greater part she repressed her despair when others were about, showed a countenance pitiably composed, said little, and at no time revealed her inmost thoughts. But Mr. Goodchild was not to be deceived by this apparent calmness. He was afraid that she would presently come down with that mysterious malady known only to the novelists, "brain fever."

What she needed most, in his opinion, was the companionship of a sympathetic older woman. To be sure, Mme. von Schwandorf did her best; but that good soul's attempts at comforting were chiefly limited to sighs and furtive tears. If only Bertha Linkow were in Florence now!

To all her father's timid suggestions of a change of air Frossie responded:

"His grave is here."

And whenever she went out, Camillo's grave was her objective.

But invariably her cab stopped first at the flower-stalls in the Mercato Nuovo. The flower-women, who had somehow learned her story, stared after her as she drove on, rigid in her black gown, the fine bouquet of white roses laid across her knees. Alas! it was too late for violets in June, the month that was to have provided her wedding-day.

Sister Aggie wrote from England a letter full of genuine distress, perhaps the sincerest and kindest lines that she had

ever penned. John Holland, who had read of the tragedy in a newspaper, sent a note from Alexandria; he was as far away as that! And one day Domenico, the little doorporter, brought Frossie another card from Baron di Campofornio. She remarked, in her new, colorless voice:

"I'm not at home, Domenico. And you can say so, without coming to me, any time that gentleman calls."

But there were visitors to whom she could be kinder.

After a decent interval Fava and Azeglio had resumed their visits. Once more Federico solemnly set the tea-table beneath the palmetto palm; cigarette-smoke mingled with the perfume of the flowers; Giannina, the maid, looking down from a window above the glass corridor, muttered to herself:

"Like June a year ago except for a black dress and an empty chair!"

For always, when the company were assembled, there seemed to be one chair too many, which nobody had the courage to remove.

Nor could they refrain for long from speaking of the absent one. In this fragrant place, vivid with many blossoms, swimming in the sunshine of an afternoon which had been intended for delight, their voices unconsciously were hushed, as if they felt near them an invisible presence, or at least that influence which is said to impregnate spots where the dead attained their earthly raptures. Certainly, if his shade was capable of haunting Florence, it would come straightway here, where he had been happiest, where those who had loved him were assembled now.

Maybe it was Azeglio who recalled an adventure which he had shared with Camillo long ago, when they were classmates in the cavalry-school at Pinerolo. He recounted an incident all the more pathetic because of the jollity that had produced it. The imagination of Azeglio's auditors eked

out the artless tale: one saw Camillo radiant in the joy of youth, his lustrous eyes gleaming, his white teeth glistening in a mischievous smile.

Frossie thought, "Why couldn't I have known him then?"

It was Fava who told of him in Tripoli. His men had adored him, calling him among themselves, in the most complimentary phrase that an officer could earn, "*Un' vero signore*." The toil and anxiety of war had not changed him, unless that in battle he was more gay than usual.

"Always jokes, when the carbines began to pop! Sometimes his platoon, while they were shooting, would be one broad grin. I remember, when we charged at Sciara Sciat, his sword and his wit flashed together: he chose to pretend that he was a barber shaving Bedouins. In the end his horse was ham-strung — poor old Scozzone, that he rode when he won the prize at Tor di Quinto. He wept that night, in his blanket, which I shared with him. You know, Scozzone used to reach into the breast of his jacket for lumps of sugar."

They were silent till Toto Fava rose with a sigh.

"And now," he said in conclusion, "it is like Good Friday in the barracks."

Frossie gave him a warm hand-clasp.

"You are good to come here and talk of him," she murmured.

"Eh, Signorina, I shall come as long as I am permitted, and as often," answered Fava. And he sent at Thallie, from his squint-eyes, one more entreating look.

But Thallie, knowing just what look was coming, had averted her head.

Nowadays she was sorry for Fava; she wished for his sake that he would get over his desire to marry her. For though many another girl, in pique or weariness or cynical

self-immolation, might have accepted him long since, Thallie felt that if he proposed to her a thousand times her thousandth answer would be "No." It was not that she still regarded him as ugly: these months of familiarity had lessened the extravagance of Toto's features. Nor was it that she found him uncongenial now: one could not help thinking kindly of him since Camillo's death. But even if she could have brought herself to marry a man with whom she was not in love, that step would have been prevented by another scruple. In her morbid introspection Thallie always perceived an indelible stain on her heart.

Of a nature extremely sensitive and unsophisticated, imbued with an acute appreciation of morality, she suffered the most exquisite torments when contemplating, in her bed at night, the consequence of her mistake. Out of the artless past her innumerable dreams of love rose up to mock the future: the wedding-scene that she had so often pictured, even in her childhood, was engulfed by a cloud the color of lead, from the midst of which a great hand, adorned for some reason with a graved carnelian, emerged to point accusingly at her breast. The march from "Lohengrin" was drowned out by a terrific thunder-clap; the wedding-guests fled through the gloom with gestures of aversion, and in the ensuing silence a clear peal of laughter sounded, the laugh of the black-haired woman of the Cherbourg tender.

At least it would disarm them all if she entered a religious order? She saw herself in a medieval cloister that was bathed in an eternal peace, wearing the chaste robes of a penitent sister, meekly painting altar-pieces.

But the churches, those famous sanctuaries of conservatism, had as yet no use for altar-pieces in the Post-Impressionist style!

Yet she found that she was making no progress even in her new manner of painting. The truth is, her canvases

— where one could discern in them anything intelligible — showed the effects of despondency and lassitude. But Thallie believed that Florence was responsible for these symptoms. She now understood Marinetti, the Futurist, who wanted to destroy all Italy's old artistic treasures, so that art might no longer be fettered by traditional forms. "Of course, he is right! How can one hope to paint in the spirit of the twentieth century, when every walk through the Piazza della Signoria brings one face to face with such slavish imitations of reality as Michelangelo's 'David'?" So she wanted to bury herself in some remote, wild place, as Gauguin had buried himself in Tahiti, and draw inspiration from the primitive.

Poor Thallie! she did not realize that when the mind is distraught one cannot hope to think sensibly even of artistic theories, much less produce paintings which will set the world afire.

Frossie, at least, understood these difficulties now; for Frossie, in her turn, was suffering a similar disorganization. She, for her part, went so far as to assert, "I'm sure that I shall never write again."

And even Mr. Goodchild found it hard in these sad days to make progress with his tragic poem.

By this time, however, he had finished three cantos. The persecuted lovers, *Rodolfo* and *Fiammetta*, were once more in the clutches of that tireless villain, *Piero de' Medici*. After fleeing half-way to Pisa, they had been overtaken and dragged back to Florence. There *Piero*, now almost out of diabolical schemes, was determined to hang *Rodolfo* outside the window of *Fiammetta's* cell in the Bargello, where, to transcribe his own words:

"Now she who loves him and despises me
A horrid sight at break of dawn shall see —
His form, erstwhile so manly in its pride,

Beyond the bars suspended there outside,
And tapping, tapping, 'gainst the casement-pane,
Essays, though lifeless, entrance all in vain ! ”

At this point Aurelius was moved to pen a few lines suggested by his own experience :

Ah, if Piero's plot is consummate,
We, gentle reader, shall but view the fate
Of many a weeping maid, whose wretched plight
Is caused sans aid of Medicean might !
For oft' there rise between a loving pair
Bars which no mortal strength apart may tear ;
Hands stretched between those emblems of duress
Must grasp despairingly but emptiness,
And one, imprisoned still, may only yearn,
And one, made free without, would yet return !

But the poet was unwilling that the prospective reader should be left, as a result of these reflections, in a pessimistic state. Was it not Aristotle who declared that the author owed it to his public not to disseminate hopelessness, but to ennoble, through his use of tragedy? Aurelius, resting his domelike brow upon his hand, composed the following antidote :

'Tis true that oftentimes this unequal duel
With Providence primarily seems cruel :
Irreverent words mar lips that love has kissed,
Or Heav'n is menaced by a brandished fist.
But hold ! who knows what more benevolent plan
Moves the great mind ambiguous to man :
Who dares to say Almighty God is bent,
Like a Piero, on our punishment !
Nay, nay, eternity is not to-day ;
The Persian said, “ This, too, shall pass away ” ;
And tears shed here are meant to purify
Our hearts for the rewards of by-and-bye !

All the same, Mr. Goodchild could not bring himself to visit upon *Fiammetta* such bereavement as had overtaken Frossie. To him those children of his brain were living persons now; he had for them an almost parental fondness, and when he considered all the suffering that *Piero de' Medici* had caused them, he could hardly forbear to destroy that wretch immediately, and end his own suspense.

If he did so, the tragic poem could be published by some high-class firm in time for the autumn trade; his royalties ought to be pouring in by Christmas.

Unless book-publishers were as leisurely in their payments as the executors of estates!

Here it was mid-June, and the legacy had not arrived. Aurelius, in fact, was becoming anxious on that score. As for Aggie, one saw from her letters that the delay was getting on her nerves.

But then, everything was getting on Aggie's nerves just now.

She believed that England was an unlucky place for her. Cyril, to be sure, was as much the worshipping lover as during the honeymoon, while the Bellegrams, perhaps because of the young couple's present expectations, were now quite amiable. But Aggie was losing the poise and shrewdness with which she had formerly been well equipped; and this mental disability, keeping pace with her physical distress, proved specially annoying at the moment. Just now, if ever, she needed all her wits about her.

The truth is, Cyril's relative in the foreign office sometimes ran down to Devonshire for a week-end at Twelve Chimneys. On his second visit at least Aggie ought, in ordinary circumstances, to have used her wiles to good effect in suggesting to him that a court-dress was really necessary to complete her fragile charm.

But he was a lean and icy gentleman, scant of hair, with

teeth of doubtful authenticity, who had been well inoculated against folly in his youth. Ever since, as befitted a clever person on the way to statesmanship, he had obtained his best recreation watching others play the gull. Indeed, so well was he versed in the tactics even of feminine diplomacy, that at the first move he seemed to anticipate the whole elaborate play.

Here, at last, was an antagonist worthy of Aglaia's highest art, and she not feeling well enough to accept the challenge!

As a matter of fact, it was he who put an end to her manoeuvres, one evening when for a moment they found themselves alone together. He said, with a twinkle in his eye:

"It seems to me, young lady, that you rather want me to make our Cyril a secretary of embassy! Understand, I sympathize with that ambition, and find it quite reasonable, so far as you yourself are concerned. Indeed, if wives instead of husbands were appointed to the diplomatic corps, I'd propose you as a candidate to-morrow. But unfortunately it's Cyril whom we must consider; and really, my dear, he has no more ability to fill a diplomatic post than I have to sing that charming piece of yours, the *whatdye-calle*m, the '*Vissi d'arte*' from '*Tosca*.' But the consular service is an easier matter. Perhaps I can send you to Japan. Come, now! That's not so bad, is it?"

With a man like this the only resort was frankness. Smiling at him resentfully, she said:

"And to-night I took pains to put on my prettiest dress!"

At any rate, she was able to write to her sisters that Cyril was about to be appointed "a consul to Japan." And, as consuls still seem to many persons no less splendid than ambassadors, this announcement created a profound sensation in the Pension Schwandorf.

Mr. Goodchild lost no time in forwarding this news to Zenasville. His letter was crossed by one from Selina Inchkin. She wrote:

You will be rejoiced to know that the "Thespian Art" in Zenasville is nobly keeping pace with the pulse of the U. S. A. Last week our Dramatic Society gave a magnificent stadium performance of "The Trojan Women" by Euripides, at the base-ball grounds. The "diamond," as I believe it is entitled by the so-called "fans," provided the stage; yours truly appeared in the rôle of *Hecuba*. But, alack! the accoustics were miserable; in fact, were wholly absent! All the while that I was delivering my lines with the body of *Astyanax* on my knees,—he was Mrs. Gookin's child, and surprisingly heavy for his age,—some of the rabble in the "bleachers," as they are facetiously dubbed, kept shouting, "Louder!" Many of these creatures—I can call them nothing else—actually got up and left: good riddance to bad rubbidge, say I! But, as the "Zenasville Recorder" said next day, "It was an occasion worthy of the best traditions of our wide-awake and bustling city, and Mrs. Selina Inchkin, whose mimetic art grows ever riper, acted with more than her customary brio, adding still another jewel to her long chain of marvelous impersonations, and at times reaching heights of afflatus that a Bernhardt might have envied!" So, you see, it was a success. My only regret is that you were not in our midst to play *Poseidon*. Tell me, are you never coming back? Ira is always saying—

And so forth.

In a postscript she added:

Poor old Dr. Numble passed from this life the day after our stadium play. It seems that he took it badly because he was not consulted on the costumes and the scenic arrangements, being, as you may remember, convinced that he was a metempsychosis of Alcibiades, or Perseus, or some other "Trojan" warrior. Though the afternoon of the presentation was quite warm, he insisted on walking to the ball-grounds; and all through the tragedy, even while I was acting, kept fretting and fuming at what he called the inaccuracy of the production. Naturally he was mistaken, for everything was designed by Miss Viola Stallwiggon, the principal of the Zenasville Art Academy on Birch Street! Nevertheless, he was

much excited, and went home and smashed his cane against the mantelpiece, and had a "stroke." Heigh-ho, such is life! None of us can exceed our allotted span, and the poor doctor was certainly very close to the "century-mark," as they say.

So Dr. Numble was gone!

Aurelius, dropping the letter, let his silvery beard descend upon his breast. Never again should he hear the tapping of that cane, the asthmatic wheezing of that voice, or see, emerging into the zone of lamplight, that ancient visage, half-wild, cadaverous, full of a senile greediness for the warmth and laughter and refreshment of the studio.

And the great work—"A Proof of the Soul's Transmigration, by One who Remembers his Previous Existences"? Had the doctor, like Flaubert while agonizing over that encyclopedic novel "*Bouvard et Pécuchet*," been denied the great joy of writing with a flourish, "*Finis coronat opus*"?

"Yes," sighed Aurelius, "art is long, and life is short indeed! Even a hundred years are not enough for all the tasks suggested to the creative brain. But surely the universe only appears to defeat those aspirations of mankind? Surely the labors that seem so cruelly cut short are merely interrupted? In the mysterious future we shall begin again where we left off? That would account for the precocity of genius."

Princess Tchernitza, when next he called on her, admitted that those suppositions were correct.

"You are quicker than most to grasp the principles," she told him. "It is possible that even in this life you may perceive the dharma, the eternal law."

And she admitted that it was safe for him to read the *Bhagavadgita* and the *Upanishads*.

Her apartment in Viale Principe Amadeo was now free to Mr. Goodchild even when no theosophical tea-party was

in progress there. She received him in a cubbyhole crowded with exotic gimcracks, the air heavy with attar of rose, exhaled from her voluminous green robes. Aurelius sat attentive on a Turkish cushion: the Bulgarian towered above him on a divan covered with swastika-signs and triangles. Her mountainous bosom heaved as she exhaled a cloud of cigarette-smoke. Her thickly powdered countenance, with its wealth of chins and sprouting moles, imitated the drowsy benignity of Buddha. Her deep voice rumbled like an oracle in a cavern as she instructed the disciple.

She expounded the three great truths, namely, that God exists and is good, that man is immortal and his future splendid, that a divine law of absolute justice rules the world.

She explained the logos, the vast guiding force or deity of the solar system, part of the infinite whole which is God.

She enumerated the investitures of man, wrapped layer on layer around the spirit, which was a spark of the logos. The spirit lay within the soul, the soul within the mental sheath, the mental sheath within the astral, the astral within the physical. The physical and the astral bodies could not recognize previous incarnations because they had not had any. It was only within these two envelopes that past lives were recollected.

“Then how do we remember who we were?”

“As Leadbeater has said, all information which reaches us from the world without comes to us through sensory vibrations. If we make ourselves sensitive to additional vibrations, we shall acquire additional information, that is, become clairvoyant. One grows conscious of the worlds which are finer than the physical — though intermingled therewith — by increasing the personal vibrations till attuned to the vibrations of those finer worlds.”

“And just how does one accomplish that?”

"Ah, my friend, at present it would be dangerous for you to know. Such powers must only be put into hands prepared to use them."

"But you, Princess, have attained a consciousness of your past lives?"

"Of many."

"And you were?"

"Well, once I was the Roman Emperor Vitellius. To-day his gluttony still tempts me a little; but, thank God! in this incarnation I have yet to spend a million lire on a banquet!"

"You Vitellius! It makes my head whirl."

"Ooy! I could show you, in this room, some things which would make your eyeballs roll on the floor. You have read how Madame Blavatsky called flowers through the wall, received letters instantly from the ends of the earth, or, in a trance, communing with two Tibetan mahatmas on the astral plane, uttered aloud the messages of those we call the dead? Rest assured that the secret did not die with her!"

Aurelius grew still paler at the thought, "To speak with the beloved dead! To know for sure that all is well with them!" But Princess Tchernitza, even as his lips were forming the impassioned plea, solemnly raised her hand as fat as a pincushion and glittering with many rings.

"Not yet!"

And, to change the subject, she pulled a tasseled bellcord. It was her custom, between lunch and dinner, to have a "trifling repast."

Aurelius, out of politeness, took a bite himself.

Then the princess, as if she had been fasting for a week, devoured meat-stew made scarlet with paprika, kabobs of mutton, pilafs, molds of rice and beef in vine-leaves, egg-plant smothered in oil and garlic, vermicelli stewed in

honey, Sadova cheese, thick coffee flavored with rose-extract. Replete at last, she lighted a cigarette of Kavala tobacco and grew pensive. She confessed that this food of her own land made her homesick.

She began to rhapsodize about Bulgaria.

She had been born near Vrshetz, not far from the Serbian border, on the Stara Planina, the "Old Mountain," which foreigners call the Balkan range. Her ancestral home, the castle of a long line of princes, had stood on a peak so high that few of the pine-trees had found courage to climb up to it. Far below, through a void where eagles floated, one saw the valley hamlets nestled amid plum-orchards, the roads where creeping specks were buffalo and oxen, the village green, no bigger than a postage-stamp, where on Sundays the peasants danced, pin-points of blue and crimson, to the music of the *gaida* and the *gusla*.

But the Tchernitzas had lost their aery to a rapacious creditor; they had forgotten, she said, to "keep white money in reserve against black days." And now she was an exile here in Florence! But some time she should find the wherewithal to buy her castle back.

"When that day comes you shall visit me; you shall see Bulgaria! The rose-fields of Kazanlyk and Karlovo! Those three wonderful mountain-tops, Yumrukchal, Maraguduk, Kadimlia! At daybreak my people shall wake you with songs to which our great Christo Boteff has set delicious words: there shall enter your window melodies handed down by ear from the days when Alexander was not yet born! Listen, my friend!"

And she sang, in her voice as deep as a man's, a slow, sad ballad: how a poor young fellow heard a girl's necklace make a sound like "*zveka! zveka!*" and ever afterward carried in his heart the echo, "*yeka! yeka!*"

But these enthusiasms passed. Princess Tchernitza's

vast shape was gradually relaxed by such a torpor as a boa-constrictor shows after swallowing his meal. Her thick eyelids drooped. A look of vacuity clouded the features huddled together in the midst of that expansive countenance. Behind the multi-colored glitter of her rings — too splendid to be genuine — she stifled the first yawn.

Aurelius made his adieux. As he left the apartment a low rumble reached his ears. The princess was snoring.

He strode back toward the center of the city. The declining sunlight shone in his eyes; a ruddy mist flooded the Borgo degli Albizzi; the cornices of the six old palaces seemed dissolved in flames. In Via del Corso the cook-shops, open to the street, were already seething with activity: fires blazed behind the turning-spits; the big pewter dish-covers on the counters reflected the sunset like vessels of fine gold. Here the crowd was thickest; above the swarming heads moved cab-drivers on their boxes, cracking whips. From high windows looked down the pale, speculative faces of young women, their eyes swimming in that *morbidezza* so interesting to Italian amateurs of beauty. Two glances met in mid-air; an almost imperceptible motion was exchanged; a casement stood empty. But the Madonna of the Ricci, behind her iron grille, remained just as Taddeo Gaddi had painted her more than half a century before — unless it was that she flushed, in the level rays, with a divine remonstrance.

The Piazza Vittorio Emanuele shone as though fresh from the hands of a myriad gold-beaters. The Café Hirsch rose from behind a hedge of metal tables that nearly filled the footpath. "I'm late! My favorite place will be gone!" But no: the nook inside, close to the plate-glass window, was being held for him by Constantine Farazounis.

Aurelius apologized for being tardy. The Greek's flat, vermilion lips displayed a servile smile as he replied:

"But I cannot expect for you to think of me, my sir, when so many more interesting peoples are begging of your notice. Only, remember, all coins of friendship is not good at the bank."

"I don't understand."

"Ah, do you remember, long ago, when I first met you on the train, how I sayer to you, 'Beware of tricks in Florence'? Well, they are still here, those tricks! See to it as you don't fall into them, my gentleman!"

"Even now —"

"These things are none of my business, as much as you please, excepting, out of my fond heart for you, I would not like to see you in some trouble. It is not my fault if I am passing in Via de' Leoni when you are stepping in the Hôtel des Grands Ducs."

"One moment," said Aurelius, with sudden stateliness. "The Hôtel des Grands Ducs, as it happens, houses a lady in regard to whom your point is badly taken."

"A vaudeville actress, perhaps," exclaimed Constantine Farazounis, with a despairing gesture.

"Well, sir, and what then? Must I take up the cudgels even with you, my old friend, on behalf of that persecuted Muse, Terpsichore?"

The other rolled his thickly fringed eyes in a disagreeable manner.

"I have warned you," he said, and drained his coffee-cup to conceal a bitter look. "Remember, I have done at least my all!"

Aurelius, softening at these words, inclosed the Greek's sticky fingers in a generous grip.

"And I thank you sincerely for your good intention. But if you knew the recipient of those calls of mine, you'd see the unworthiness of your suspicions."

"No doubt," Constantine assented, in a smothered tone.

it was some time before he broached the subject of buried treasure.

appeared that an agent of his in Egypt, a faithful black-r whose life he had saved long ago, had sent word to hat some German archæologists were nosing round the nid. This certainly meant that the treasure was in er of discovery. In another month those wretched ons might pounce upon that untold wealth them-

3.
But this is most distressing," gasped Mr. Goodchild.
:—I mean you—would be left completely in the
,"

Yes," Farazounis assented gloomily. "We—I mean ave waited almost too long."

Unless —"

ie Greek, flashing at Aurelius a sidelong look, began to e on the marble table-top. A drone escaped him:
ares, camels, bakshish, tent, foods—Turkish pounds, ish pounds, dollars —"

their heads were close together. Out in the street a man coat of purple velveteen, moving aimlessly among the s, stopped to stare at them with a peculiar expression. as M. Alphonse Zolande, the painting-teacher. He et his white imperial grow again.

aware of this surveillance, Constantine Farazounis pered:

My sir, it is a verree, verree great adventure. I do not to tell you how much in dollars it must needs."

Come, let's have it, anyway!"

Not less than fifteen thousand."

Merciful Heavens!"

On the other side, the profits! Millions upon mil-
!"

embling, Mr. Goodchild stammered:

"But fifteen thousand dollars! Besides, the legacy is still held up. And, after all, the money is n't mine to use."

"All right, my gentleman," said Constantine, presently, with the shrug of a fatalist. "We kiss good-by, you and me, the idea of being millionaires."

And he rubbed from the marble every pencil mark, as if effacing the aspirations of a lifetime.

After that, for some time, in the Café Hirsch Aurelius had only Otto to keep him company.

Nowadays the little Swiss waiter hovered round Mr. Goodchild like a bee about a sugar-pot. In his fat face despondency had been replaced by feverish eagerness. At the slightest chance he resumed his account of the enormous profits to be derived from "chic hotels." He even knew of a property for sale on mortgage, a hostelry between Nice and Monte Carlo, just where the most fashionable traffic in all Europe passed along the Corniche Road. A coat of paint, a fresh sign-post—inscribed "Hotel High-Life," perhaps—a genius in the kitchen, and the place could be turned into a Golconda!

But here was the same dilemma: the legacy, even when it arrived, would not be Mr. Goodchild's to invest.

Nevertheless, Otto no longer peaked and pined. An extravagant hope now enabled him to endure almost blithely the bondage of the Café Hirsch. And now Aurelius had every day eight lumps of sugar, instead of four, to feed to the cab-horses in the Piazza.

Frequently, what with all he had to think of in these troublous times, he forgot to distribute those tidbits. At the end of the week he often found in his breast-pocket half a pound of sugar. And more than once, when visiting Nella Tesore, as he whipped out his handkerchief the white cubes were scattered all over the floor.

Respect for the memory of Camillo, which forbade at-

tendance at the Alhambra Music Hall, did not prevent Mr. Goodchild from calling at the Hôtel des Grands Ducs. In the Tesore's seedy sitting-room, beneath the fresco of the stout lady pestered by a swarm of cupids, Aurelius began to feel at home.

She warned him that she was no longer going to treat him as company.

Curled up in a ragged arm-chair, she kicked off her slippers in order to examine the heels of her diaphanous silk stockings. She confessed that when a pair showed holes, she threw them out of the window. Her excuse was that at present she could not afford a maid.

Possibly that was why everything about her was in such confusion.

Petticoats, the wash just delivered, soiled plates, scent-bottles without stoppers, now frequently intruded into the sitting-room. Here and there, on a piece of furniture, one found a half-eaten bonbon which had not suited her taste. The music-scores were soon stained with coffee in a fine Bohemian manner. Then, between two visits, there appeared on the wall a broad red splash, as if from a glass of wine, the height of a man's head.

How in the world had that happened?

But the International Star herself, no matter what condition her apartment might be in, always revealed a luxuriant sort of daintiness, the significance of which was lost on Mr. Goodchild.

One afternoon when he had been ushered up-stairs before he was expected he saw in the corner a cane with a golden sphinx's head.

"What! You know my good friend Farazounis? He is here?"

She explained that the cane belonged to the hotel proprietor, who had just called to raise her rent. The poor

man was lame; she could not imagine how he had forgotten it.

"Remarkable! It is exactly like the one I gave to Mr. F. last Christmas!"

"Zat is nozzing. My fazzer, blessed soul, 'ad one almost ze same, only it was a full-lenk lady in a leetle baizing-suit, like at ze Lido."

A door in the bedroom, giving on the hall, slammed shut. The breeze, no doubt? Silence fell; to Aurelius the warm air seemed unaccountably freighted with suspense. Nella Tesore was standing motionless before him, her undulous form outlined, beneath the folds of her pale-yellow negligee, in a pose of almost classic symmetry. Her near-set eyes, dilated till they seemed immense, turned slowly humid.

She whispered:

"An' you 'ave not been jealous when you see zat cane?"

Aurelius felt his hands turn cold, perhaps his feet as well. For a moment it was as if the brains had been scooped out of his head. In a voice which he hardly recognized he managed to reply:

"I — really — I assure you —"

To this denial she responded in accents the pathos of which she had never equaled on the stage of the Alhambra:

"*Ohimè*, zat I zould wiss you were a leetle bit!"

It was a test unprecedented and wholly unexpected. Still, suddenly he knew that deep within him, unrecognized, so to speak, by his objective mind, his hours in this shabby sitting-room had produced a subtle predilection the only clues to which had flitted through the dense obscurity of dreams. For a moment even Aurelius Goodchild felt a vertiginous helplessness.

But there came to him, like the wind from an illimitable sea, a memory that swept him from the present safe into the past. Once more old vows and old resolves formed above

him that high arch of rainbow hues which cut the heavens straight from his youth to the hereafter.

And presently he was able to say :

“ My dear, I — you see, when my poor wife passed away, I decided not to marry again. But I should deem it the greatest honor in the world to — yes, to be a father to you.”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THALLIE MAKES A DISCOVERY THAT TAKES HER BREATH AWAY

FOR a week Aurelius was distressed by the thought that Nella Tesore had fallen in love with him. His conscience, always tender, tormented him; he wondered if unwittingly he had said or done anything to inflame her heart. After recalling in detail his every visit to her, he decided that he ought not to hold himself responsible. It was one of those catastrophes that are not to be foreseen; in short, it was fate!

Her karma, no doubt, had made it necessary for her to suffer from an unrequited passion.

For the Tesore's affections seemed destined to remain unsatisfied. After that one moment of frailty, Mr. Goodchild had not wavered. This is not to say that he fled into a desert and played the anchorite. On the contrary, a pitying interest, a vague feeling that he had incurred some serious obligation, now drew him more often than ever to the Hôtel des Grands Ducs.

Maybe in time he could undo this mischief? He should try to show her that love, as the majority of human beings understood it, was really a will-o'-the-wisp; that pure friendship, just as Plato and the primitive Christian Church declared, was much more gratifying.

Nella received him with a touching timidity, her laughter gone, her eyes downcast, her voice unsteady. Her indoor attire was less sophisticated now; her countenance was gradually cleared of make-up. The lobes of her ears denuded of

their imitation pearls, she sat in the dilapidated arm-chair darning stockings! She seemed a different woman.

Aurelius, gazing at her, was filled with amazement. Could this meek creature be the magnificent International Star, who had Florence at her feet? He recalled his first impression of her, his timid longing to meet her merely for a moment, in order to express his admiration of her art. He remembered the afternoon when Fava and Azeglio had presented him to her: how bashful he had been in the face of her cordiality! And to-day, as a result of that encounter, she sat before him as humbly as *Thaïs* before *Damiel* the hermit.

Though, of course, there was really nothing of *Thaïs* in Nella's constitution — except that Nella, according to her own confession, now enjoyed her stage-work no more than did the darling of Alexandria in the third act of the play.

She complained that "for some reason" her gay little songs all stuck in her throat.

Then she expressed disgust at the triviality of her impersonations: it no longer pleased her to appear behind the foot-lights in spangled skirts and a bersagliere hat, to chant the adventures of pretty shepherdesses. She felt in her breast nowadays a capacity for tragedy; she might still, if the opportunity appeared, become another Duse or Ristori. But that could never happen in Italy; her public, accustomed to this present style, would not take her seriously as a tragedienne. Yet there were other countries; for instance, Argentina. And she conjured up a scene, possibly in Buenos Aires, wherein a new star might rise to the dramatic firmament amid the plaudits of a great Italian colony.

Mr. Goodchild found nothing incongruous in this picture.

"But zat alzo takes money," she sighed. "Ah, yes, more money zan you zink! For zere is one — what do you say? — one sad *segreto* in my life."

"Let me share it!" Aurelius besought her.

"Ah, zat is somezing I mus' suffer in myself."

One afternoon, however, when the slovenly page-boy had sent him straight up-stairs, Mr. Goodchild paused with his hand raised to knock at the Tesore's door. Behind the thin panels her voice rang out fiercely in Italian:

"And I say that if you do, I will take a walk to the police about another matter, maybe a little matter of forged paintings!"

A man's voice, smothered with rage, but somehow familiar, retorted:

"You threaten me, you? And this although I had him first!"

"What of that, imbecile? Is n't there plenty for both of us?"

While Aurelius was not well enough acquainted with Italian to understand the words, it was impossible to miss the fact that a quarrel was in progress. Frightened by those violent tones, amazed that some man was on such intimate terms with the Tesore, he stood trembling, uncertain whether to rush in and protect her or to withdraw. In the end he crept down-stairs, abashed by the thought of having listened even for a moment at her door.

Perhaps this was the mystery in her life?

When he returned, to apologize for his involuntary eaves-dropping, she admitted that he had discovered her sad secret.

It seemed that she had been born at Posilipo, near Naples, of poor but honest parents, who had left her an orphan at an early age. One saw her, in the dark hours that followed, thrown upon the world with only three assets, her voice, her beauty, and her virtue. She had become, by force of circumstances, one of a troupe of street-singers; the young man who played the mandolin was soon infatuated with her.

Too late she discovered that he was a member of the Camorra, and that the marriage ceremony had been performed by a pickpocket gotten up for the occasion in the cassock of a renegade priest.

Yet despite his duplicity the scoundrel had loved her in his way. Three years he had held her in subjection, had driven her with mingled blows and kisses to sing to his tune, though the notes that she uttered rose from a breaking heart. Her pathetic airs were soon famous in that emotional city,—she became a sort of Neapolitan *Esmeralda*,—but it was the Camorra, instead of the populace, who, figuratively speaking, gibbeted her. For by dint of bloodcurdling threats they used her to forward their nefarious schemes: it was she, in the dark alleyways behind Santa Lucia, who mewed like a cat while the victim was approaching. One morning, when the mandolin-playing rogue was found riddled by stilettos, she thought that at last her day of liberty had come. But no: the Camorra did not permit such easy resignations from their ranks. They compromised thus far: she was allowed to retire from the active list to the reserve, in which she must remain through life, subject to any call from the Supreme *Camorrista*, unless she bought her freedom by a contribution of twenty thousand lire to the protective fund.

So this was the shadow that hung over her, the knowledge that at any moment she might be forced again to do the bidding of those villains. Indeed, that fatal hour was already imminent. A great coup was being planned in Naples; she had been picked as the decoy. The man with whom Aurelius had heard her quarreling was an emissary from the *Capo Camorrista*, demanding of her that nauseating service. Was it any wonder that she, who wanted only to be good, should reproach her parents for having brought her into the world?

This neat tale stupefied Mr. Goodchild. But suddenly, in a noble frenzy, he leaped to his feet.

"Never! Never! Divine Providence will not permit such diabolical things! Give me the names of those wretches, yes, and their soubriquets! I'll inform the carbineers! No, I'll wire a friend of mine, who has just returned to Naples from Alexandria, a Mr. Holland. He'll know how to set the law on them, you bet!"

The Tesore, shaking her head, reached out to press his hand.

"Not zat, my poor frien'. You mus' not even w'isper it. Some would escape; an' ze nex' day, even here in Firenze, I zould be dead."

"But this is frightful — a pure heart shackled to iniquity! By Heaven! something shall be done!"

"Twenty zousand lire does not grow like olives," moaned the International Star.

When he had left her, Aurelius drifted among the streets of Florence without any idea of direction. Three times, like a person lost in a forest, he made the same circle through a maze of lanes to find himself peering at a statue informed all at once with a horrible significance, Giovanni da Bologna's "Rape of the Sabines" in the Piazza della Signoria. The beggars, huddled on the loggia steps, were afraid, to-day, to whine at this tall apparition with disordered hair and beard who sent his vacant stare straight through them, whose pallid forehead, recklessly exposed to the sunshine of July, seemed crowned with madness. But abruptly there popped up beside him a ferret-faced youth with a tray of postcards suspended on his chest. Mr. Goodchild started back as though a cobra had raised its hood before him. If some Camorrist made a feint of mandolin-playing, others might easily pretend to peddle post-cards!

And Aurelius made off blindly into Via Calzaioli, his long black coat-tails in commotion.

At last exhausted, he perceived that he was standing in the middle of Viale Principe Amadeo. He stumbled into the apartment of Princess Tchernitza. She was reclining on the divan in the cubbyhole cluttered with esoteric objects; the persiennes were lowered at the windows; dusk was already entrapped in this weird nook. But, with one look at his face, she bellowed:

"Well? Out with it! What has happened?"

"Nothing," he groaned, and sank down upon the Turkish cushion.

"Is it nothing, then, that you resemble some one about to jump into the Arno?"

"Money, that's all! Money, of which Epictetus says, 'Make answer that it is not a good!'"

Princess Tchernitza opened her mouth as wide as if she were going to toss a cream-puff into it.

"You have lost the legacy!"

"No, it has not arrived. And even if I had it in my hands —"

"Well?"

"As you know, it is no longer mine."

"Out of a hundred thousand dollars, and that is to say five hundred thousand lire, I think you deserve to call some little bit your own!"

He clutched his brow between his hands. What a dilemma! Certainly, his first duty was to his children. But surely they, too, would agree that four thousand dollars was a small amount to sacrifice in order to drag a woman from a whirlpool of depravity? Suppose he explained to them the calamity which had befallen Nella? But wait, he had promised the Tesore not to breathe a syllable; he had even

given his word to Toto Fava not to mention the Tesore! Ah, these promises in which he had been gradually enmeshed! What a snarl everything was in! Why had he ever left the peace of Zenasville, Ohio?

But Princess Tchernitza was booming some advice:

"As I understand the question, after having offered each of your daughters a third of your inheritance, you feel that you were just a trifle hasty?"

"Oh, no! Except —"

"Precisely. Well, since the quandary is, above everything, a moral one, what could be better than to seek advice of the most moral source at our disposal? I mean, from the departed."

This suggestion, offered when his nerves were already as taut as bow-strings, made Mr. Goodchild bounce upon the Turkish cushion. But the obese Bulgarian commanded:

"Sit still! It is possible that even now I can bring myself into touch with the invisible. Be astonished at nothing. Above all, don't disturb me, no matter what you see me do."

The princess enlaced her fingers across the higher contours of her elephantine person, lowered her eyelids, sank back on the divan amid the pillows embroidered with lotusbuds, sistrums, swastika-signs and the cartouches of Egyptian gods. In the gloom her green robes billowed out as if ready to overflow the cubbyhole; on her puffy hands rising and falling with her breath the many-colored rings sent forth an intermittent glitter like the eyes of snakes; her moon-shaped face, receding into the vague confusion of the gimcracks on the wall, resembled the mask of an outlandish deity of long ago.

A few moments of silence followed. Then, without warning, that mountain of flesh began to twitch, to heave, to shake all over, galvanized as it were by a current of something more uncanny than electricity. The enormous visage

s distorted; the features all seemed to swim about and
ange like Dr. Jekyll's when he had drunk the potion.
orts burst from the Bulgarian's nostrils; a long shudder
if at dissolution passed through her from head to feet.
t finally there came relief from this convulsion, a gradual
iescence, immobility. And there stole out upon the air,
om the lips which normally spoke in tones as deep as a
n's, a thin, childish treble, apparently of a little girl,
ich uttered:

*"Oko sogrimko lukilo ika vomphrotika vo kapastigri-
zo?"*

Aurelius, leaning forward with a fallen jaw, winced at
s gibberish. His apprehension was swallowed up by de-
air: if this was the princess's "control," how could he
pe to understand the message? But again the puerile
ice issued from the medium's lips:

"Oh, yes! To-day I must speak English. Excuse me,
d old gentleman!"

Mr. Goodchild at last achieved a timid question:

"Pray whom am I addressing?"

The voice responded with a giggle:

"Call me Zaphigrastra. During my last earthly visit I
d that name, in lost Atlantis. You see, I spoke first in
at tongue from force of habit. But I understand all
guages now. I am really very clever! Ask, and I shall
swer."

For a moment he was afraid to risk the question which
ant everything to him. But in the end, his forehead be-
wed with icy drops, he blurted out:

"My wife?"

"I don't know, kind old gentleman. I suppose we in-
bit different planes. And it is so big over there! Hush,
nobody is speaking to me. He says he knows where she
She is in church."

"In church!"

"I can't explain. There are no proper words in English, or any other of these languages. He says that she is happy, because she is surrounded by such pretty colors. I think that means she is still on a plane near at hand. Yes, she is waiting for you, so that you and she can go on together."

"Waiting!"

With a sob, he bowed his head. Death, which his philosophy had taught him not to fear, now seemed more beautiful than ever: his longing, suddenly strengthened by countless memories, even made him forget for a moment, in his love for her, the triple love wherewith she had endowed him before departing. He thought, "If only I could join her now, this instant!" He forgot that in such a case the three Graces would be left undefended by a father's care.

But his mysterious informant seemed to resent this interruption. The childish voice exclaimed impatiently:

"If there's nothing else you want to ask, good-by! The princess is suffering; it's dangerous for me to stay too long."

Aurelius collected his scattered wits.

"Before you go, tell me this! Should I be justified in retaining a small part of the legacy —"

"Yes, in a good cause."

"Such as —"

"One moment. Some one else has approached me, another old gentleman, who has lately passed over. He says he knows you well. He asks me to tell you that he, too, was once an inhabitant of lost Atlantis. His name in that life was Yama the Great."

Dr. Numble!

"He says you should use some part of your legacy to spread the three great truths, to build in Florence a temple of theosophy. My princess will know how —" The thin

dwindled to the faintest pipe. "My princess will —"

voice was silent. The medium suffered a violent
opened her eyes, and groaned in her familiar bass:
hat has happened? Oh, my poor head! A glass of
"

séance was over.

emple of theosophy! Instead of a solution, a new
ia!

went home bereft of what little judgment he had
from his interview with the Tesore. He could eat no

When Frossie and Thallie grew alarmed, he ex-
l, with a tragic gesture, "Those executors!" He
into bed well assured of a sleepless night.

Ive o'clock had long since struck; the last roistering
blades had passed beneath the balcony, bellowing their
ditties. Aurelius noticed a beam of lamp-light under
ughters' door. He scrambled up, donned his bath-
and blue carpet slippers, knocked softly on the panel.
d stood empty. At the writing-desk, in kimono and
pectacles, sat Frossie, fountain-pen in hand.

ot working!"

must do something," she muttered. "If I go on do-
hing, I shall soon be crazy."

it at this time of night!"

his is the time of night when I need to occupy my

after Mr. Goodchild, mournfully wagging his beard,
uffed back to bed, she bent her plain, strong face once
oward the sheet of foolscap, on which she had writ-

was silent, so far as mortal ears could hear. Through the
s towered the cypresses, vital, intelligent perhaps, like souls
d to live out their lives in one spot, without the desire for

wandering, or the knowledge of what wandering might bring them. And Dora, gazing from them to the broken column that shone amidst the laurels, asked of the starry sky, "Why was I not as firmly rooted in my birthplace as these happy trees, instead of being gifted with the mobility that has brought me here, half-way around the globe, to scatter my tears upon a tomb?"

It was the conclusion of the first chapter of still another novel, which, in tracing the life of a young woman widowed on her marriage-day, was designed to make the whole world — or at least the English-speaking part of it — weep sympathetic tears. And why not, if there was truth in the theory that all such work was pervaded with a dynamic force, that the reader felt precisely as much emotion as the author had experienced while writing? For Frossie, as she penned those pages, could not help weeping herself.

She still made her daily pilgrimage to Camillo's grave. Kneeling down beside the mound, she removed from the turf every twig that had been wafted there. Then for a long while she sat back on her heels, contemplating the butterflies which hovered round the tombstones. Thallie, who often accompanied her, at last persuaded her to come away.

Once, as their cab was leaving the cemetery, there appeared a limousine all too familiar to both of them. The motor-car stopped; the door swung open; Baron di Campoformio sprang out, bareheaded, into the road. But Frossie called sharply to the coachman, "Drive faster!" At full speed the cab flashed past Campoformio, who, choking in the dust, raised his eyes beseechingly to Frossie's averted face.

And Thallie was no less agitated than her sister; for once more she had met the coldly calculating stare of the chauffeur Antonio.

There was now no doubt that he had identified the masked and hooded fugitive from the carnival ball.

So there descended upon Thallie a new dread, scarcely

less sickening than that which she had endured after Reginald's flight, while wandering through the misty streets at twilight, and peering with an awful speculation at the river. "Murder will out." The old saying throbbed in her ears as her heart-beats were quickened by reviving terror. Now Thallie knew the sensations of the criminal who cannot be at peace; now she understood the phrase, "And every bush an officer." And every motor-car that neared the Pension Schwandorf was a limousine upholstered with plum-colored cloth, as cozy as a little boudoir. And every hand that set the pension bell to jangling was the hand of the chauffeur Antonio, who had become her Nemesis.

Sometimes, slipping out alone, Thallie took cab for the suburbs. To delude herself into the thought that she was leaving Florence and her fears behind forever, she penetrated the country-side as far as Grassina or Galluzzo. In that rural loneliness, where olive-trees twisted their blanched limbs beside a brook, she bade the driver stop, alighted from the cab, entered the silvery groves. Here, at last, silence enfolded her; a simple fragrance rose out of the fertile earth, and from the clear heavens was spread a benign refulgence, a divine invitation to serenity. Laying her hands upon her breast, Thallie raised her fair young face, and with her sky-blue eyes wide-open, her ripe lips parting, she whispered:

"O God, Thou knowest that I've never meant any wrong. Please, this once, forgive me my trespasses, as I forgive those who trespassed against me. Don't punish me any more. I promise to be a good girl all the rest of my life."

She returned home determined that thereafter every act and thought should plead for her release from chastisement.

But a lingering uneasiness, added to the heat of the Italian summer, once more absorbed the roses from her cheeks. All her energy evaporated; she could no longer paint pic-

tures in the Post-Impressionist manner. She wondered how she had ever hoped to be a famous artist. One afternoon, putting away her easel and her paint-box, with swimming eyes she descended to the garden. In the leafy arbor, close to the gate-posts still decorated with their crumbling urns, she sat down beside Frossie, to whom Domenico had just brought a note of condolence from Mme. Bertha Linkow.

The prima donna, her season at the Metropolitan long since finished, was now at St.-Moritz. John Holland, writing from Naples, had informed her of Frossie's tragedy. It was evident that her warm heart had suffered from this news. "For you should know," she had scribbled, in her quaint, Germanic-looking script, "I feel myself a kind of old sister to my dear little Frossie, notwithstanding I am so seldom times blessed to give her a good hug in my proper person. And to my dear little Thallie it is understood! Yes, and to Aggie also! But for you, poor lamb, so big as are my arms in one direction, I could to-day wish them still bigger already in another; yes, big enough to reach from Schweiz to Florenz! Never mind; maybe that, too, will happen yet."

"That last sentence looks almost like a joke," was Frossie's comment. "But I'm sure she did n't intend it so. Do you think she means that she may come to Florence presently?"

Her sister made no reply.

"Thallie, you're crying!"

"It's nothing. Only I think I've just said good-by to art. Now I know how Aggie felt when she found out that she was never going to be a singer."

"But, Babykins, if you'd only go back to your old style!"

"It's no use. This afternoon I seemed to see it all in its

true light. I simply have n't got it in me. And I'd rather stop now than struggle on just to be a flivver. But oh, Frossie, it's so hard to give up the idea of being somebody!"

And once more, behind the screen of leaves and blossoms, the sisters mingled their tears. How many tears were shed, how many sighs were uttered, that summer in Mme. von Schwandorf's genteel pension!

Even the uniforms of the Magenta Cavalry now struck a depressing note at tea-time.

In that atmosphere Toto Fava found it harder than ever to make love to Thallie. To Lieutenant Azeglio he admitted that he was almost in despair.

"She still thinks of the other," Azeglio suggested.

"Eh, that Reginaldo! May he come down, wherever he is, with a good case of cholera! But no: he would not have departed like that unless she had refused him. Perhaps it was about a question of dowry: he showed himself too greedy? And I should be so reasonable on that score! Almost any amount would satisfy me. Do you call a hundred thousand lire an exorbitant sum? What is that to an American? The old man surely has ten times that much locked up in some accursèd bank."

Lieutenant Azeglio, being a Lombard, had inherited a more practical mind than Toto. He volunteered:

"There must be poor Americans as well as rich. For some time it has seemed to me that if this one were a millionaire he would be swelling it say in the Hotel Alexandra."

"He says his affairs, while large, are momentarily involved."

"Then control your adoration till you see how they come out, those large affairs," the prudent Azeglio suggested.

But even then that financial reckoning was imminent. The very next day, in fact, while his daughters were out,

expecting any moment to see frenzied depositors forming, pass-books in hand, in a long line. He became aware of a bitter taste in his mouth; he discovered that he was mumbling a black cigar which somebody must have pressed upon him in the course of the negotiations. He tore this weed from his polluted lips and hurled it to the pavement. A boyish ragamuffin swooped down upon it with a chirrup of delight.

"Perhaps the signore also has a match?"

Aurelius, after mechanically feeling in all his pockets, staggered away toward the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele.

On the far side of that square, the very stones of which seemed boiling in the heat-vibrations, the Café Hirsch danced up and down before his eyes. He remembered Constantine Farazounis and the buried treasure.

A straw to grasp at! More than that — a chance to recoup, to swell the legacy far beyond its formerly imagined bulk, to divide among his daughters, instead of this miserable sum, the "untold riches of an ancient dynasty"! He no longer felt the scruples which had forbidden him that golden project. On the contrary, the Egyptian adventure now floated through his panic like a sublime inspiration, a veritable godsend.

But those German archæologists who had been snooping round the pyramid! Oblivious to the fact that the Greek had ceased to appear at the café, Mr. Goodchild set out, between walking and running, across the hot piazza.

Half-way, a new thought stopped him in his tracks. He leaped at a passing cab.

"Hôtel des Grands Ducs!"

And five minutes later, his face streaming, the veins on his forehead congested into knots, his patriarchal beard in extraordinary disorder, he burst into the Tesore's sitting-

She rose to her feet in amazement. Her face was white-washed; her lips were covered with carmine; her black bang was glossy with pomade. The pale-yellow negligée, the costume which any one but Aurelius would have compared to the habiliments of Venusberg, enhanced once more, with its peculiar artfulness, the opulent contours of the International Star. But, then, this was not Mr. Goodchild's usual calling-hour.

His heart was pounding so that he could hardly croak:

"When is it for, this Neapolitan outrage?"

Her near-set eyes gave forth an irrepressible flash.

"Day after to-morrow!"

"Then I am in time to save you!"

"*Madonna!*"

"Yes, yes; I am justified now, because I shall make it up many times. My daughters will never miss it when I pour into their laps the profits of a certain wonderful investment! They will still be rich, and you, to whom I owe an obligation so delicate that it is not to be expressed in words, will be free of the tyranny which has darkened all your life. And there, in a new world, before a different public, no doubt in Buenos Aires, you will have your heart's desire at last!"

"Argentina," she faltered, clutching the chair-back.

"But Argentina is zo far from you, an' zo eggspenzive!"

"One moment!"

Galloping down-stairs, he sprang into the waiting cab.

"*Credito Italiano!*"

When he rushed back to her, he had with him in Italian money the equivalent of five thousand dollars.

"The rest," he panted, "is for traveling."

After staring dumfounded at this fortune in her hands, she jumped at Aurelius and twined her arms about him.

"Ah-h-h-h-h! now I know zat you do loaf me!"

And because joy gave her an unusual strength, while he, for his part, was almost foundering from his exertions, the benefactor could not prevent that momentary treason to the dead. But the next instant, eluding the International Star, he gained the door on bending legs. Even for Mr. Goodchild, conversant as he was with the ideas of Plato and the primitive Christian Church, so lately re-fortified in the high resolves of half a lifetime, this last emotional climax was one to be escaped without delay.

"To-morrow!" he gasped.

"To-morrow!"

The door came shut behind him. The shoulders of the black cutaway coat were well smeared with liquid powder, but Aurelius was safe. If he had but known that so far as this cajolery went he was now safe forever!

He dashed off to the Café Hirsch.

The place was empty at this torrid hour; only Otto was there, seated at the table by the plate-glass window, oblivious to the flies that buzzed around his rosy jowls, nodding over a copy of "Die Woche." But when Aurelius rushed in, the little Swiss waiter stood up with a look of consternation.

"*Himmel!* it is Mr. Gootschild, stricken by the heat!"

"Monsieur Farazounis?"

"Not here, as you can see."

"His address!"

"*Ach*, Mr. Gootschild, the address of that gentleman he has not been giving it away on hand-bills. But do sit down for a moment, yust to please Otto. *Da!* Now a leedle something cooling, a syrup of limes *und* seltzer? I could even make cold a towel for your head."

"I tell you I must find him instantly!"

"So? Then supposing I should send a boy to the police, where is recorded all the domiciles?"

"That's it! Only be quick!"

But the period of waiting that ensued seemed endless to Aurelius. He was sure that the Greek had left Florence in a huff, that this gorgeous opportunity was to be denied him. His fright returned; perhaps he had been a bit hasty in giving the Tesore that five thousand dollars. Again he jerked out his watch. An hour, and no news of Constantine! This certainly meant ruin. His rolling gaze encountered the Swiss waiter, standing at a distance, watching in his old attitude of dejection.

The hotel on the Corniche Road, between Nice and Monte Carlo!

Almost without his bidding the words tumbled out of Mr. Goodchild's mouth:

"Otto, if you can set up in that business on a capital of twenty-five thousand francs, I'll back you."

The waiter's countenance turned ashen. Tearing off his apron, the badge of hateful slavery, he staggered forward to kneel at Mr. Goodchild's feet. The tears fairly squirted from his eyes as he kissed the hand of this wild-eyed liberator, this disheveled demigod who had made his dream come true.

"*Mein Gott! Das neue Leben!*"

Constantine Farazounis entered the café.

His swarthy visage, too, was pale; even his flat lips, beneath the crinkly mustaches, had lost most of their vermilion hue; his coffee-colored eyeballs, however, were uncommonly bloodshot. Furthermore, all his features expressed the excitement of a man to whose conscience a sudden call suggests a dozen possibilities, ranging in attractiveness from ready money to a cell. But when he had shot a glance as swift as lightning round the bare café, he came forward with a more assured air, folded his arms, bestowed on Aurelius a look in which reproach and suffering were admirably blended.

"Well, here I am, my gentleman."

"Thank Heaven! I thought I had lost you!"

The Greek, still motionless, like an effigy of injured friendship, contented himself with raising his eyebrows sadly.

"And?"

"Oh, Farazounis, believe me, if I have in any way offended you, it was not from lack of confidence or gratitude! But now the qualms that restrained me have been swept away; it is not only a pleasure, but a duty, to accept your generous proposal. I conjure you, tell me that your offer still stands open!"

The Greek responded:

"My sir, I have not a hard heart. I bear no malices. I remember other days when we gave each to each those tokens of affection. So even now I am willing to say yes. Is it come, the money? Then I shall start to-night for Egypt."

And while Aurelius, arm-in-arm with Constantine Farazounis, was making one more journey to the Credito Italiano, there occurred in another part of town a meeting which, if it had come about a few days earlier, would have saved the Goodchild family considerable worry.

Thallie, too restless to await the evening breeze at home, had ventured out for a walk. Chance brought her finally to Santa Croce. She entered the cool church, unaware that for half an hour a man had been following her.

She found herself almost alone in that historic edifice, the many haphazard embellishments of which gave it a motley appearance. As she wandered up the nave, between massive columns of *serena* all adorned with antique coats of arms, the heels of her little buckskin shoes clicked loudly on the pavement studded with the lids of tombs. From each of the western windows, set with fourteenth-century stained-glass, a shaft of polychromatic light descended, to

enfold for a moment the white-clad, lissome figure that floated toward the transept. The man who was hesitating on the threshold gave vent to a long sigh.

Pausing, casting round her an uncertain look, Thallie recalled some traditions of this sanctuary. Here many of Italy's illustrious dead were laid at rest. Beyond that doorway the Inquisition had forced Galileo to recant. And once upon a time, when Fra Francesco da Montepulciano held the pulpit, this nave had resounded with the wails of thousands swooning from remorse—a vast cry had rolled against the rafters, "*Misericordia, misericordia, misericordia!*" Hark! Like an echo from the past a smothered groan drifted through the silence.

Or was it the response of her own heart, still condemned to suffer for the folly of a moment?

"But all my life so far," she thought, "has been made up of foolish dreams and sad wakings."

A moss-rose, given her by a former model whom she had just met in the Mercato Nuovo, was pinned to her belt; she wanted to place this flower on the tomb of Michelangelo, whose genius she had recently derided. She turned to enter the right-hand aisle, where that great Florentine lay buried. An unhappy man was standing in her path. It was M. Alphonse Zolande, the painting-teacher.

How old he looked, with his wrinkled, leathery face, his snow-white pompadour and mustaches and imperial! He was shabby again: the purple velveteen coat was fine no longer; the pointed boots, bereft of lacquer, were split across the toes. To-day his faded flowing tie exhaled not the slightest scent of chypre. The perfume-bottle was empty.

His chin jumped up and down half a dozen times before he could articulate:

"Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle, I beseech you, don't turn away from me!"

She stood looking at him in pity.

"Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle, I must entreat you first to pardon me. I have suffered so much, thinking that to you I must always be a hateful creature. But how can I hope for you to understand my weakness — you, who are like that rose!"

Her delicate skin began to flush as she responded in unsteady tones:

"I understand, and I forgive you."

"Ah, how angelic you are! But who should know that better than I? How many times have I not cursed my ignoble faculties, which refused to acknowledge that you were different from others, like a saint enshrined behind candles of pure wax!"

At this she bowed her head.

"But I shall not bother you with words which are of no interest to you. This is the last time, Mademoiselle, that you will have to bear the sight of me. I am going back to Paris. In departing I want to do you the only service in my power. Mademoiselle, there is in Florence a certain Greek who calls himself Constantine Farazounis. You know the name? At least Monsieur Goodchild does, for every day they are together in the Café Hirsch, Piazza Vittorio Emanuele. But this Farazounis is a rascal, a cheat, a thief. He will end by ruining your father."

Much disturbed, she said:

"It's kind of you to tell me this."

"Mademoiselle, it is you who are kind to listen. And now, because this meeting can hardly be a pleasure to you, adieu, good luck forever."

M. Zolande did not presume to offer his hand; but Thallie extended hers. His collar was broken at the folds. She ventured gently:

"It seems to me there's still some tuition due you —"

He started back, his leathery face disorganized by shame.

"No, Mademoiselle!"

On a sudden impulse she unpinned the moss-rose from her belt.

"At least you'll accept this in memory of those mornings when I used to make your coffee?"

Gingerly he took the rose between his fingers. His knees sagging, he watched her pass through the polychromatic shafts of light from the stained-glass windows, like an immaculate young soul progressing from one glory to another over a pavement of old tombs. She went quickly, for her throat, too, was swelling. Both were thinking of the happy hours, four flights up-stairs in Via de' Bardi, when age had groped backward in the hope of love, when youth had reached forward in the desire for fame. Both knew that the longings which had beautified those days were never to be fulfilled.

She had gained the Lungarno before she recalled Constantine Farazounis. Reaching home, she flew to Frossie with her news. When Mr. Goodchild appeared, the two girls confronted him. Aurelius had no choice but to tell them everything.

In the midst of her dismay there came to Thallie, as naturally as a faith in a superior being whose protective powers were infallible, the thought of John Holland. And for some reason it seemed neither strange nor presumptuous to send to him in Naples this telegram:

We are in trouble. Could you come to us?

That same night the answer was delivered at the pension: John Holland promised to arrive in Florence next day.

Thallie went to the railroad station to meet him.

Although too uneasy to have felt, while dressing, the slightest interest in her appearance, she had never looked

more charming than on that fiery afternoon of July. Her linen frock, touched here and there with Florentine embroidery, short enough to afford a glimpse of silken ankles, increased her habitual suggestion of a virginal freshness. Her wide hat, of white straw trimmed with snowy poppies, enhanced the fine auburn of her curls. And the shadow from the hat-brim, though emphasizing the delicacy of her face, did not abate the milky luster of her throat, ringed round with the two-fold rimple.

In the smoky station resonant with the noise of locomotives, amid the sweltering crowd assembled at the ticket-taker's barrier, Thallie stood waiting. A stream of passengers and porters began to flow out through the gate. Behind the barrier she caught sight of a tall, thick-set figure, a calm, strong face, and, extended toward the ticket-taker, a large hand ornamented with a graved carnelian.

Wrapped in a somber reverie he came toward her, followed by a man-servant and a porter laden with valises. His illegible eyes were attracted by her white dress. He almost stopped short; but the next moment she felt the firm pressure of his hand.

"You came out alone, on this broiling day, to meet me!"

She was astonished at the unnatural stiffness of his smile. Despite the heat, his fingers, wrapped round hers, seemed cold to Thallie. And suddenly, not from his look or tone of voice, but just by a flash of intuition which pierced her developing heart, she realized at last that the celebrated John Holland was in love with her.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

FAREWELL, GOLDEN CITY, RICH WITH SO MANY GRIEFS
AND JOYS

IMMEDIATELY on his return to Florence, John Holland proved that even a historian of dead races may be a man of action.

At the Pension Schwandorf, his baggage waiting in the cab, he questioned Mr. Goodchild. He expressed no surprise when Aurelius imparted to him that complicated tale. He had no reproaches to offer, any more than if he were dealing with a frightened child who had destroyed a roll of bank-notes. But when the culprit plucked up sufficient courage to reaffirm his confidence in Otto and Farazounis, a look of compassion passed over John Holland's face.

"We shall see," he replied, and set out to begin the work of salvage.

He drove straightway to police headquarters. There he got the addresses of the Swiss waiter and the Greek adventurer. Since he did not hope to find Farazounis still in Florence, he went next, accompanied by a young detective as handsome and romantic-looking as a *Romeo*, to the Hôtel des Grands Ducs. The rakish door-porter informed him that the lady, despite her obligation to the Alhambra Music Hall, had departed for the north the previous evening.

"For the north?"

"By the Genoa express."

John Holland reflected that a woman of ordinary cunning would say north when she was really going south. On the other hand, one slightly more adroit, anticipating that a pursuer would disbelieve her, might divulge the true direction. There was also to be considered the question of ships outbound for South America, though John Holland suspected that for the present Switzerland or France would seem safer to the International Star. Of course it would be possible to question the baggage-handlers at the railroad station. But since the Greek's haul was three times more important than the Tesore's, John decided to leave the tracking of the vaudeville actress temporarily to the police.

He took time, however, to drop in at the Café Hirsch.

Otto Bürglen, "age forty-seven, Swiss citizen, waiter by profession, short, stout, blue eyes, hair blond, but scarce, face round, no distinguishing marks," had the day before thrown up his job in a spectacular manner. In fact, according to the café-keeper, he had suddenly gone mad. He had been violent before the patrons, had raved of boundless wealth, and, after grossly insulting the whole personnel, had rushed away announcing that he was the proprietor of a "chic hotel at Monte Carlo."

At Otto's lodging a shriveled crone declared that the Swiss had departed for the Riviera.

Possibly this fellow, at least, was more of a fool than a knave. John Holland suggested to the detective that, as a first resort in Otto's case, the police send a telegram to the Franco-Italian border.

But there remained the question of Constantine Farazounis.

His attic-room in Via Santa Reparata revealed the peculiar disorder that a fleeing criminal produces. Ragged odds and ends of clothing were strewn about; an old trunk yawned empty beneath a garish lithograph of "the Incorn-

parable Nella Tesore "; a heap of charred paper lay cold in a greasy saucepan. The young detective, examining a towel, remarked:

"He has done away with his mustaches. Still, that need n't disturb us. These Orientals always make off, by instinct, toward the south."

"I agree with you. As a matter of precaution, you might tell the Brindisi police to watch all ships clearing for the East. I fancy, though, that I shall run into him in Naples, somewhere between Via Roma and the Corso Garibaldi."

"You go after him, Signore?"

"By all means," John Holland replied, with a smile which gave his rugged features a new look. "We ought to have lots to talk of, he and I: we're both so fond of archæology."

An hour later he was speeding back to Naples.

The only notice that the Goodchilds had of this departure was a scribbled line delivered by the cabman. John Holland bade them not worry if they failed to hear from him for several days. And, indeed, they were destined to endure a fortnight of silence and suspense.

What was he doing?

Thallie could scarcely share in full the anxiety of the others; she was too much preoccupied with her discovery. At one moment, remembering his celebrity and age, she called herself a goose; but soon, reviewing that moment of clairvoyance in the railroad-station, she felt that if there was a goose in this galley, it certainly must be a gander. One moment: she did n't quite mean that! John Holland, even if he were tempted to fall in love with twenty-one years, could never appear ridiculous. Like everything that he did or said or wore, this state of mind would have to seem, somehow, correct and sensible. After all, there must be many men of forty who married girls hardly more than

alf their age? In some cases such a union might even be excusable: for instance, when the man of forty was exceptionally well preserved, a strong character, a sympathetic nature? Yes, one could imagine how a young woman in very special circumstances might be sufficiently attracted by that type.

"But, goodness! for me it would be out of the question!"

And looking askance, her cheeks burning, she found herself picturing, with an unpleasant agitation, this new creature, so different from the speculations that had once enraptured her.

"Quite out of the question! Besides, even if I should ever love again, which I surely never will, sooner or later the past would rise up between me and whoever it might be."

Nevertheless, the belief that a new heart was yearning for her affected Thallie in an interesting way. To be sure, she felt not the slightest revival of the bliss which had followed the realization that Reginald desired her. Neither as she inveigled into the momentary weakness that had reigned over her one night, almost a year ago, when Toto, so young and fervid though so homely, had first proposed to her. But since love, at its approach no matter in what guise, always seems momentous to a disposition naturally ardent, it was as if the world round Thallie had been subtly but profoundly altered. Even though her heart was not affected, she experienced some of the phenomena of passion — the Italian skies seemed brighter; the hot, calm air of early August was permeated with an elixir; the familiar landmarks took on the freshness of new places. Even though she repeated to herself that she should never again be fond of any one, she felt stirring within her body a joyancy evokative of past days, and in her head more alert and energetic thoughts. This was not love; it was merely the subconscious exultation of a highly sensitive young crea-

ture to whom amorous homage was as stimulating as is sunshine to a flower.

Of course, she was unable to withhold this news from Frossie. For a while the latter, leaning back in a chintz-covered chair, could only gasp. At last:

"O Thallie, you must be mistaken!"

"Really! You find it absurd? Very complimentary to me, I'm sure!"

"You know I don't mean that. But Mr. Holland! Has he said anything?"

"Well, no."

"Has he done anything? Looked at you in a sentimental way, or squeezed your hand?"

"Mr. Holland," retorted Thallie coldly, "is above such silly tricks."

"Then what in the world makes you think it?"

"Did Camillo have to tell you in so many words?"

This speech was scarcely out before Thallie threw both arms around her sister's neck.

"Forgive me! How cruel I was to recall him when you'd forgotten him for a moment!"

"I don't want to forget him for a moment," Frossie responded quietly. "And I remember that the first time I ever saw him, standing in front of the Nobles' Club in Via Tornabuoni, I seemed to know that he loved me, or was going to. So no doubt you're right, Babykins. I only hope that you, at least, may be happy."

"What do you mean, happy? Do you think I could be happy married to a man unless I cared for him, you know, that way? And then, you forget what's gone before. I could n't confess all that, and my conscience would hurt me every hour, and some fine day it would all come out anyhow. And even Mr. Holland would turn away. Not that it makes any difference," she concluded, with quivering lip,

"except that I'd naturally like to keep his respect — and, what's more, not hurt his feelings. Because, after all, it's an honor that I ought to appreciate. And so I do. Only, you can see for yourself that it's quite, quite out of the question!"

One result of her discovery was an accentuated dread of Baron di Campoformio's chauffeur. This emotion, as it turned out, was not unreasonable.

On a sultry afternoon,—there seemed to be a thunderstorm brewing somewhere,—Mr. Goodchild sat huddled beneath the palmetto palm in a blue funk. His grand hopes denied, his confidence in his fellow-man extensively disturbed, his optimism crushed, he shrank into his chair afraid to raise his eyes toward the shuttered windows of the annex, where his daughters were. With a hollow groan, he crumpled in his fist another letter from Aggie, who was more impatient than ever for her share of the legacy.

"A rogue all the while!"

But Otto, surely, was honest? And Nella! Some day they would all acknowledge that she was good! Of Farazounis, however, a shocking account had been made out by the Florentine police: why, the man had lived by forging copies of old masters! "Maybe," Aurelius thought, "his criminal habits were due to his heredity, his juvenile environment? There can be no children's courts, no big brother movement, in the Orient?" But the fact, no matter how it had been produced, was inescapable. Fifteen thousand dollars at least gone up the spout! Could fate have any further calamity in store for Mr. Goodchild?

Domenico, the little door-porter of the pension, came softly to him with the words:

"Somebody is asking for you in the vestibule, sir. I think it is Baron di Campoformio's chauffeur."

It was, indeed, Antonio, in whip-cord livery, fumbling

his cap, with eyes obsequiously cast down, but for all that showing on his broad, ignoble countenance a look of sullen resolution. As Mr. Goodchild came forward through the hall, the chauffeur measured that tall, frail figure with an avid gaze. A species of smile drew back his lips; after bowing, he squared his shoulders with a better confidence.

"Well, Antonio! You have a message from the baron?"

"No, Signore. I have come on a trifling business of my own. Is there some place where we can speak in private?"

Aurelius, oblivious to Domenico's distress, courteously ushered the chauffeur into the parlor, cool, shadowy, full of cuckoo-clocks and painted tambourines and old brocades that gave forth an odor reminiscent of the little yellowish house in Zenasville. Antonio had the good grace to decline a chair.

In tones that were meant to be confiding and pathetic, he informed Mr. Goodchild of his longing to emigrate to the United States. He was weary of driving motor-cars for a pittance; he wanted to be rich. He had a friend in New York; perhaps Mr. Goodchild knew him: the name was Mike Innocenti. This Mike, though only a taxicab chauffeur, sometimes made on wet days as much as fifty lire profit. For a struggling man of family like Antonio — since there was an ailing wife, not to mention the seven poor little ones on view to date — a daily income of fifty lire, well, body of Bacchus! one could understand its charm! The only obstacle was the cost of getting there.

"I'm dreadfully sorry," Aurelius faltered, "but at present I really could n't assist you."

For a moment Antonio looked at him with eyes half shut.

"Nothing?"

"Unhappily, it's quite impossible now."

"Not even in return for something that one would not like to have generally known?"

Mr. Goodchild's comprehension of Italian was still so slight that he had to ask Antonio to paraphrase this speech. An expression of bewilderment overspread his face.

"What secret do you mean?"

Antonio, coming close, assuming a flushed and dogged look, as who should say, "Here goes," began to whisper in Mr. Goodchild's ear. He whispered thickly; he whispered dramatically; he whispered with what seemed a vicious satisfaction: so *Piero de' Medici* often whispered in the tragic poem. But Antonio, the chauffeur, whispered of modern things, of happenings no staler than the most recent carnival. And finally, from the tangle of unfamiliar words, the listener extricated the intention.

The afternoon quiet of the Pension Schwandorf was shattered by the roar:

"Reptile!"

Domenico came flying. Mme. von Schwandorf, bounding out of her boudoir-office, found herself possessed of the agility of forty years ago. Both rushed into the dim parlor. What a sight met their eyes! Aurelius Goodchild, disciple of Epictetus, was throttling Baron di Campoformio's chauffeur!

Antonio was a sturdy rascal, plumped out by much farinaceous food and wine, inured to muscular labors; yet Aurelius shook him as a terrier shakes a rat. A fearful strength equipped the father's spindling arms; his whole lean frame was suscitated by a supernatural energy; his visage, paper-white above the bristling, gray-and-sandy beard, resembled the face of an infuriated god — say Jupiter, in the act of blasting the impious with thunderbolts. And in fact, so frantic was his rage, so complete was the transformation of his nature, that if he had been let alone a moment longer, Baron di Campoformio would have needed a new chauffeur.

But Mme. von Schwandorf and Domenico were there. In the end they pried Mr. Goodchild's fingers from Antonio's throat. That wretch, already groveling, fell to the floor; Aurelius, staggering back, collapsed upon a divan. His breathing was so stentorious that Mme. von Schwandorf took it to be an apoplexy.

"Brandy, Domenico! And then, quick, a doctor! *Che Gesù perdone!* he is surely dying, and, *Gott im Himmel!* where are his daughters? Federico? High time you came along! Here, do away with this *schlechten Kerl*, this *malcalzonaccio* who brought him to this pass! If he were not the baron's servant I would charge him with a felony! Is he gone, the assassin? May his head always be as now, a foot from his shoulders! Ah, *vergogna!* in my pension, where never before was such a thing! For this they will certainly take the star away from me in Baedeker!"

Aurelius had to be carried to his bed; he who had lately been so prodigious was now as weak as water. It was the reaction from a frenzy such as he had never known before.

"What have I done?" he lamented. "I've laid my hands in violence on another; I even meant to kill him. Heaven forgive me, if the provocation was n't ample!" And to Thallie he quavered, "Imagine, he tried to tell me —" But turning his head on the pillow, he concluded, "No, Babykins, in your presence I could n't so much as hint at what he said."

As for Antonio, he left the neighborhood of the Pension Schwandorf at full speed. But he had not run far when shame and rage made him feel as if he were going to explode. Discovering that his throat was still capable of emitting oaths, he cursed all the way from Santa Maria Novella to the Duomo. Thereabouts a great thirst for revenge pervaded him. He slunk into a wineshop, tossed off

some glasses of punch, rearranged his torn collar, and set out for the cavalry-barracks.

He inquired of the sentry if Lieutenant Fava was within.

Lieutenant Fava was at that moment about to set forth for a visit to the Pension Schwandorf. Spick and span, his boots glossy, his rat-tail mustaches wonderfully waxed, fresh wash-leather gloves tucked into his sword-hilt, he descended from his quarters to the whitewashed barrack-entry. The troopers of the guard, rising from their bench, saluted. Toto Fava, glancing not unkindly toward the full-length mirror just inside the gates, began to wet a Toscano cigar all over, preparatory to igniting it.

Antonio timidly approached. With the gestures which an Italian peasant uses to convince superiors of his devotion, he whispered, whispered, whispered. Toto Fava, his unfortunate visage perfectly expressionless, at last succeeded in lighting his Toscano. When he had it drawing well, he spoke not to whispering Antonio, but to the troopers of the guard. He said, in a conversational tone of voice:

“Kick this fellow into the street.”

The order was obeyed with true military despatch. Between the boots of the troopers and the cobblestones before the cavalry-barracks there seemed to be small choice in respect of hardness. Antonio, the chauffeur, while limping rapidly away, concluded that this tale of his was an unlucky one.

But Toto Fava never paid another visit to the Pension Schwandorf.

To his comrades he did not seem different, except that for a week or two, at hurdles and while riding down precipices, he was possibly more reckless than before. He resumed his saunterings with dark-eyed ladies in the Circonvallazione; and if his sallies lacked their former snap, one laid it to the heat. Sometimes, in the café which served the lieutenants

of the regiment as a mess-room, he smiled sardonically when love was made the topic, and filled his glass too often. But even his bosom-friend Azeglio had to guess. There was good blood in the homely, impecunious Sicilian.

In the pension garden, no longer embellished with the uniforms of the Magenta Cavalry, tea-time was a forlorn hour nowadays. Amid the courageous roses, still holding out against the August heat, Aurelius and his two daughters sat nibbling biscuits in a painful silence. The season of "caravans," of personally-conducted tours, had returned: night and morning the pension reëchoed with excited chatter which increased the Goodchilds' loneliness. One handsome, full-blown girl from Phoenix, Arizona, demanded of Thallie, "how long she was scheduled for this stop?" When Thallie answered that she lived in Florence, her fair questioner's expression seemed to ask, "Land sakes, but why?"

Why indeed, unless because John Holland had not reappeared?

One day when they were sitting under the palmetto palm a rustle close at hand, a faint scent of geranium, made all three look up together. There before them stood Mme. Bertha Linkow!

Her blue Teutonic eyes were dancing; her wholesome pink-and-white face seemed surrounded by an aureole of delight; her figure, incased in pongee silk, slightly more corpulent than when they had last seen it, was shaking with merriment at their surprise. Then her solid arms embraced both girls at once; two smacking kisses resounded, and the sisters felt a warm, exuberant affection flowing straight from the prima donna's ample bosom into their hearts.

"Ah, dear children! Still the same delicious red curls, the same so-starlike eyes! Still here beneath the palm-tree! And this precious father of theirs, this saint out of a

holy picture, that I thought I was not again to see until in heaven! Look out now! While I am kissing your daughters I might make a little mistake!"

"To think, you here in Florence!"

"No, in Viareggio. Viareggio for the swimming, and the swimming for the figure. Imagine, in my last week at the Metropolitan, Mr. Gatti says to me, 'My dear, your *Venus* is perhaps becoming too Rubensesque even for the Rubenses: remember *Tannhäuser* was not conceivably a Turk!' So this summer, God willing, I swim away some portions of my waist-line! Every day at Viareggio I am the first to plunge into the sea. As for those who come after, the villains, they make out to walk timidly along the shore and ask me if I have left them any room."

"Then," said Thallie, her face falling, "you're only here for another afternoon call."

"I am only — *Ach*, little beautiful, you are more than ever like a flower! Yet there is something new already in the face. I know: you are growing up in this hothouse of a Florence. And Frossie, poor chick, how I made my eyes red for your sake! Come, that will happen again, right off, unless we talk of other things. *Herrlich!* once more I am in time for tea! And for these sweet little sugar-cakes, which I do not dare to eat in Viareggio, where all those rascals would write of it immediately to Mr. Gatti! No, my dears, I am resolved to sneak off here to you as often as you can bear it."

Indeed, that was the first of several visits to the Pension Schwandorf.

She came laden with yellow roses that matched her hair, as if the garden was not already smothered with them. She brought chocolates from Giacinta's tearoom, in a satin box no pinker than her cheeks. They told her all their troubles — or nearly all. Her intense vitality invigorated them and

gave them courage; her jokes brought a smile now and then even to Frossie's lips. It was as if a bracing wind were sweeping through the stale, familiar pension from Alpine heights where edelweiss bloomed amid the snow.

She scouted their fears that John Holland would not succeed in his mission.

"If you knew him as I do!"

It appeared that Bertha and John were friends of long standing: they had met in Paris while she was studying singing. What outings they had taken together in those carefree days with a crowd of students as gay and sympathetic as so many characters from "Trilby"! Ah, if one thought him serious by nature or lacking in waggishness, she could tell a story or two! She wagered that there were some solemn gentlemen in Paris — yes, bewhiskered members of the ministry — who would grin like boys at the mention of John Holland's name.

Thallie, while listening to these rhapsodies, began to wonder, "What was between them in those times?" Had the prima donna and the historian loved each other? Was Mme. Linkow's enthusiasm due to a lingering sentiment? It occurred to Thallie that she had never seen those two together. She hoped that their next meeting might take place before her eyes.

One afternoon, just as the opera-singer was rising to depart, John Holland walked into the pension garden.

In a suit of light homespun, his soft collar pinned under a purplish cravat of knitted silk, he did not look like a man who had just stepped off a train. His dark, rugged face, which could not have been handsome even in those Paris days, seemed in some way refreshed, perhaps as a result of his late quest. His calm, gray eyes, which Thallie expected to see turned first to her, were arrested by the sight of Mme. Linkow.

"What! Not really Bertha?"

And without the slightest confusion he sustained the prima donna's rush, her vigorous embrace, and the amazing, the disillusioning, the shocking tribute of a kiss on each cheek. Worse still, one large hand, ornamented with a graved carnelian, encouraged the infatuated woman with a pat between the shoulders.

"He's a philanderer," thought Thallie in the bitterness of outraged pride.

But one could hardly say that John Holland had been philandering in Naples.

His first act, when they were all seated round the tea-table, was to draw from his wallet a bundle of Italian bank-notes. It was the fifteen thousand dollars that Aurelius had given Farazounis.

"You found him!"

"Yes, we had quite a conversation."

"And he is now in jail, I hope," exclaimed Bertha Linow.

"By this time he is probably in Greece. I trust," said John Holland, turning to Mr. Goodchild, "that I did n't go against your wishes in avoiding the inconvenience and publicity of a trial?"

"No, a thousand times," cried Aurelius, beside himself with relief and charity. "I should not be able to sleep for thinking that while I had the money back, that unfortunate creature was languishing in some Bastille!"

Very well. Now we come to Nella Tesore. Prepare yourselves for bad news."

The International Star had been traced to Genoa, to Milan, and to Venice; there she had vanished. The police decided that she had slipped into Austria; John Holland warned her of having embarked from Triest for the New World. But even if she was caught, one might find it diffi-

cult to prove that the five thousand dollars had not been a gift.

"And so it was," Aurelius admitted.

"If I told you her real history, would you insist on thinking so?"

"Alas! how could I deny that such was my intention at the time?"

"Well, that's a question we can put aside until we find her — if we ever do, and if the money is n't spent. There remains the case of Otto Bürglen. At Monte Carlo I learned —"

"You've not been to Monte Carlo, too!"

"Certainly, and got this report from the police."

Whereupon he translated the following:

"On July 29 ultimo, there was registered at the Hôtel des Commerçants, Avenue de la Gare, Monaco, one Otto Bürglen, age forty-seven, short, stout, blond, bald, Swiss citizen, by profession a hotel-proprietor. To the owner of the Hôtel des Commerçants said Otto Bürglen communicated that he, acting in partnership with an American millionaire, was about to purchase and open the Petit Trianon de la Mer, a small hostelry on the Petite-Corniche between Eze-sur-Mer and Eze, formerly operated by one Jules Borghées, but lately closed. On the morning of July 30 said Otto Bürglen set out for the Petit Trianon de la Mer, but returned at noon in a state of excessive perturbation, to announce that the price of said hostelry had been raised, and to accuse the owner of the Hôtel des Commerçants of having telephoned to said Jules Borghées in abuse of said Otto Bürglen's confidence. Being ejected from the Hôtel des Commerçants, said Bürglen was subsequently seen by many residents of Monaco wandering at random about the principality and talking aloud in a disorderly and alarming manner. On the morning of July 31 —"

John Holland paused with the remark:

"The police of the Prince of Monaco have omitted something here. If they had been less discreet, they'd have re-

corded at this point that our Otto, distracted by disappointment, went to the casino, played roulette in order to gain the balance of the sum demanded by Jules Borghées, and in less than three hours lost the equivalent of five thousand dollars. The police report concludes:

"On the morning of July 31 the body of Otto Bürglen was found at the bottom of the port, near the foot of Rue Caroline. The pockets of the deceased contained one franc, twenty centimes. Buried, August 1, at the expense of the principality."

They were silent, touched one and all by this end of a sorry and confused ambition. At last Aurelius, in a choking voice, vouchsafed:

"He at least was honest!"

And that was Otto's epitaph.

Jabez Outwall's bequest had yielded something over fifty-five thousand dollars. The cash advance from the Bank of Zenasville had reduced this sum to fifty thousand. Ten thousand more had been lost with Otto and the International Star. With what remained of the letter of credit, the Goodchild family now possessed a little more than forty-two thousand dollars. Decidedly, Aurelius was no longer rich!

He murmured:

"Three goes into forty-two fourteen times. My girls will have only fourteen thousand dollars apiece. Ah, what a come-down!"

"As if we'd let you do that!" cried Thallie, with flashing eyes.

"As if we ever meant to!" amended Frossie, so indignantly that no further argument was possible.

John Holland sat motionless, watching them with his gray eyes, which would have shown them, had they thought to look at him just then, more than his usual sympathetic

comprehension of mankind. Aurelius would have seen that this celebrity was fond of him even in his guilt; Frossie would have perceived in the depths of that calm gaze the affectionate pity of an elder brother; but what Thallie would have learned anew was left for Bertha Linkow to discern. Yet the prima donna was less taken aback than one might have expected. She turned her head away, stared for a while at the roses climbing the yellow wall, and finally closed her eyes in order to squeeze back two tears. What had caused that moisture, compassion, a poignant feminine response to the adjacency of love, or love itself?

The droning of bees diminished in the trellises about them. The hot sunshine, having liberated the very essence of the roses, shone at its mellowest before declining. All the opulent foliage and every brilliant petal seemed to await in breathless expectancy the issue of these mortals' thoughts. A faëry spell, a sweet, persuasive influence both subtle and powerful, seemed to steal out to bind them to this immobile demesne, this fragrant garden which embalmed so many joys and griefs. But the hush was broken by the voice of Mr. Goodchild:

"It means that our days in Italy are finished."

"Yes," his daughters assented softly, "it means that our days in Italy are finished."

For one this realization evoked the picture of a grave where fading flowers would no longer be replaced, on which falling leaves would gather to produce an impression of neglect. For another there was the memory of a season bright with varied hopes that had one by one evaporated, yet had left clinging round all objects here a sort of magical mist, an impalpable veil through which Florence would glimmer exquisitely for evermore. But to Aurelius, depressed as he was by the thought of leaving all this warm, elaborate beauty, there came, as a breeze at the twilight that closes an

hour excessively fulgurous and splendid, these verses of James Whitcomb Riley:

There bide the true friends —
The first and the best;
There clings the green grass
Close where they rest:
Would they were here? No;—
Would we were *there!* . . .
The old days — the lost days —
How lovely they were!

He raised toward the fronds of the palmetto palm his aquiline face, pale, sensitive, and sanguine, already illumined anew with an incorrigible eagerness and trust. He quoted from the sage:

“ ‘Require not things to happen as you wish, but wish them to happen as they do happen, and you will go on well.’ ”

And indeed it seemed that there was nothing to do but accept the prospect of Zenasville, Ohio.

This idea made John Holland thoughtful. He had a plan whereby that return might be postponed. He asked the Goodchilds to come away for a month or two to some quiet, pleasant region as his guests. He himself had been thinking of going up to the Italian lakes; he should probably take a house beside the water; he even knew of a villa, on Lake Como, which could be rented for as long or short a time as he desired. It would be a pity to go back to Zenasville without having seen those parts.

“We saw them on our way down from Geneva,” said Thallie, with something between trepidation and resentment quivering in her voice.

“A flash of Lake Maggiore from the window of a train!”

“Really, Thallie, I don’t think you’re very grateful,” Frossie exclaimed.

"I did n't mean to be ungrateful," her sister answered faintly, shrinking lower in her chair.

In the end, John Holland's invitation was accepted.

And now their trunks took on a long forgotten significance; once more they unfolded in the Baedeker other maps than that of Florence; they counted on their fingers the days remaining to them in their second home. As the time approached, there afflicted them the peculiar lethargy of highly strung persons for whom a change is imminent. At thought of packing, all energy abandoned them, there came over them a nervous irritability, as if such a departure could not really be a natural performance. It seemed that many bonds would have to be broken at this exodus!

They had to leave their cards, inscribed "*pour prendre congé*," at the doors of the marchesa, the contessa, the baronessa, and others who had been polite to them in Florence.

And one afternoon they went to say farewell to Princess Tchernitza.

It was Tuesday, her reception day. The persiennes were all drawn down against the sunlight of Viale Principe Amadeo. In that dim apartment the guests, like the embodiments of so many eccentricities, were fluttering round a brown, fat man in a yellow robe, a swami just arrived in town, whose unctuous smile was intermittently revealed by the red light of swaying lamps.

The face of Princess Tchernitza loomed forth through the smoke of cigarettes and incense as a full moon breaks from clouds. Pressing their hands, she designated the brown Oriental, who was clearing his throat in the manner of an orator.

"You are just in time," she rumbled. "The swami is about to take a text from the code of Manu — 'He who in his own soul perceives the supreme soul in all beings, and

acquires equanimity toward them all, attains the highest state of bliss.' "

"Unhappily," said Frossie, "we only stopped in for a moment to bid you good-by."

"You leave us!"

"Day after to-morrow," assented Thallie.

"But you return with the cool weather?"

"Not for many, many days, I fear," Aurelius confessed.

The princess stared at him in dismay. But at last:

"Yes, I see now it is kismet. This morning my horoscope warned me that I should suffer a sad parting between four-fifteen and five this afternoon. But not forever! No, we shall meet again, as we have met many times in other cycles, or on the Ripa-banks of Devachân! And the temple of theosophy? Ah, well, no matter, my dear friend. It is better this way!"

And that evening, when her guests were gone, Princess Tchernitza, in the cubbyhole full of esoteric objects, repeated to herself, "It is better this way." Perhaps, had she persuaded Mr. Goodchild to found the temple of theosophy, there might have come to her an overpowering temptation, at thought of the lost aerie in the mountains above Vrshetz, where on clear Sunday mornings one saw, far below, the valley-hamlets nestling amid plum-orchards, and on the village-green gay peasants, pin-points of blue and scarlet, dancing to the music of the *gaida* and the *gûsla*. Yes, it was better so: for had not the obese Bulgarian also been in one of her numerous incarnations a Phœnician pirate?

Next day, the Goodchilds, making the last rounds of Florence, filled their eyes once more with that richness to which they felt they were never to return.

They viewed again the Tribune in the Uffizi, where were gathered the most precious of all the city's treasures, where,

as Byron said, the air around was filled with beauty. Here, perched on a stool, a young girl in a gingham apron was trying to reproduce the flesh-tints of the so-called "Fornarina" with just such eager energy as Thallie had once shown.

Traversing the gallery that spanned the river, they found themselves in the Pitti Palace, before Giorgione's "Concert of Music," and Raphael's "Madonna del Granduca," and Titian's "Maddalena," whose ringlets were the very shade of Thallie's. They passed back to the Bargello, to contemplate the radiant child's head fashioned by Donatello, that genius whom Aurelius had impersonated in the pension theatricals. They even revisited the Accademia di Belle Arti, to look at Botticelli's "Reign of Venus," because, alongside of the goddess, the three Graces were depicted. Leaving the Accademia, they found themselves presently in Via Cavour. To the north lay the military hospital. They hastily turned south.

The older streets, narrow, tortuous, decked out with chiseled niches, naïve medallions, and crenelated cornices, next attracted them. Once more they appreciated these vistas softened by age, refined by the quaint elegance of other centuries. The departing often regain the fresh vision of the newly arrived. To-day all Florence seemed to show them its first charm, like a beloved, but familiar, woman who for a moment, by a miracle, becomes a bride again.

But there were still more shrines to be visited on this pilgrimage — the Piazza del Duomo, where the Campanile exalted its magnificence, and the Piazza della Signoria, where the brown arches of the loggia roofed illustrious bronze and marble, and the high Piazzale Michelangelo, where, from his pedestal, young "David" looked down upon the roofs and domes and towers, that panorama so



There it lay before them, the golden city surrounded by its golden hills



little changed since his creator was inspired with the thought of him. There it lay below them, the golden city surrounded by its golden hills, the diminished river trickling beneath its bridges, the Lungarno ending, to the northwest, in the green blur of the Cascine. So it would go on shining through the years in its imperishable beauty.

Well, it was good to have known it even for this little while!

They descended from the Piazzale. Lingering thoughts of Michelangelo reminded them that they had omitted a last visit to the Medici Chapel. On their way back to lunch they passed the American Church, where Aggie had been married.

Toward evening, when nearly everything was packed, Aurelius, stealing out alone, made for the Café Hirsch. At the marble-topped table behind the plate-glass window some strangers were sitting. Otto would never have allowed them to do that! But a new waiter, a gross Italian with bristling mustaches, wore Otto's number on his coat-lapel.

Sliding into another corner, Mr. Goodchild uttered huskily:

"Black coffee, please."

"Black coffee!" roared the new waiter, and stamped away to the buffet.

The artists, the journalists, all the familiar patrons of the Café Hirsch, were there disputing in strange tongues, laughing, eating pastry with a relish, as if nothing had happened. "How soon a place is filled; how quickly we are forgotten!" When his coffee came, Aurelius could not drink it. He rose. With shoulders bowed, with one long look around him, he shambled out into the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele.

"It will soon be dinner-time. I'll rest a while in the garden."

In the garden he found neither Thallie nor Frossie.

Frossie was at the cemetery. She had carried there, and laid gently on the grassy mound, the last bunch of white roses from the Mercato Nuovo. As she stood with lowered head beside the grave, a laborer drew near. She addressed him:

"I'm going away to America. Will you promise me always to keep this spot as it is now?"

"Eh, Signorina, with God's help, I will do so," the man assured her. When she had given him some money, he added, "There is a certain gentleman who would make me step lively, anyway."

"Who?"

"The Signor Barone di Campoformio."

"He comes here?"

"Without telling a lie, Signorina, I can say yes to that. He has even been here at the same time as the signorina. The signorina did not see him? No, because on those occasions he stood apart, behind yonder monument. To be sure, he has a right to do so, for it is the monument of his own wife, blessed soul! But it seemed to me that it was not the inscription which occupied him at such times."

Thereafter Frossie wondered if she had not thought too harshly of the baron.

Across the city, on the Lungarno, Thallie was walking homeward in the dusk. Near the last bridge she paused to gaze down at the river rustling between broad banks of pebbles. The current, on this August evening, seemed scarcely deep enough to drown in if one were tempted to the trial by apprehension and despair. But how long ago that period of anguish seemed! Was it really she who had suffered so much when Reginald ran away? To-night she could visualize his face without a pang. She could even wonder how she had ever loved him. Bertha Linkow had

been right: the Thallie on the point of leaving Florence was not she who had entered that glowing crucible fourteen months before.

Next morning they were all afoot betimes, snatching mouthfuls of coffee, locking trunks and bags, peeping into cupboards. The baggage went down the stairs; the rooms, their beds stripped, the chintz covers of their chairs askew, looked suddenly uninhabitable. Men came for the piano, which Aurelius had given to Aggie when all believed that she was going to be a famous singer.

The Goodchilds, leaning from the windows, kissed their hands to the garden.

In the hall full of knickknacks, water-colors, and sprays of pampas-grass, were gathered the domestics who had served them. There was Federico, the saturnine waiter, and his wife Giannina, and Domenico, the little door-porter, and the chef, who had once prepared a fine wedding-breakfast, in his white cap. They received their tips, voiced their thanks, wished one and all godspeed. But Domenico, who knew that Mr. Goodchild was no longer rich, looked as if he would have been happier with a less generous fee.

As for Mme. von Schwandorf, drawing Aurelius into the boudoir-office redolent of bergamot, she whispered:

"Look here! This last week's board at least! Just for all the pleasure I have taken in your long, long visit, let us call that much my treat."

"Impossible! But thank you all the same."

"The cab!"

They crowded the vestibule. Mme. von Schwandorf embraced the sisters. She thrust into their hands some silver souvenirs tied up with ribbons of red, white, and green.

"So that you will not forget to come back soon!" she cried, her old eyes winking rapidly beneath the yellow frizzes.

The cab bowled through streets where people were sauntering with a strange indifference. At the railroad station John Holland met them. This time their compartment in the train was marked "First Class."

The wheels were turning.

They felt that they had left something of themselves behind in Florence.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

FROSSIE FINDS THAT IT IS NOT UNPLEASANT TO FORGIVE

FROM Florence the train whirled the Goodchilds and John Holland northward, past sunburned fields, shrunken rivers, baking towns, through Pistoia; Bologna, Modena, Parma, and Piacenza. In the heat of the afternoon they entered Milan, where, over a year before, Aurelius and the three Graces had made acquaintance with Italy.

The girls recalled that season: the strangeness of sights and sounds, their timidity and confusion, the feeling of defenselessness which troubles sensitive natures precipitated into an alien land. But the land was no longer alien: the Goodchild family, borne in the same open cabs through the same sort of streets, were less forlorn than they had been on the train. They remembered that though they had said farewell to Florence it was not yet time to pass from beneath these soft skies.

They alighted before a hotel in the Corso Vittorio Emanuele — in a street of awnings and balconies, noisy with tram-cars, but beautified at its western end by the pale, slender flutings and towers of the cathedral. They found themselves in a hostelry much finer than any to which they had ever aspired: the door-porter was an imposing creature with the beard of Belshazzar; the patrons, lounging about in brocade chairs, were undoubtedly persons of the utmost im-

with the heights on this side of the lake, one understood that the green fuzz which covered them was forests, that their fissures were veritable valleys, that their gilded crests were peaks worthy of the prowess of a mountain-climber. Towering on all sides round the level water, they had, as it seemed, entrapped in their midst an eternal purity and peace. At that moment the Goodchilds asked nothing better than to sit forever at a window open to this paradise.

Then they came to the spot that pleased them best of all. Behind a wall covered with Virginia creeper, on high ground, in the midst of a vivid garden set with trees, there rose a two-story villa of yellow stucco, a terraced staircase ascending to the pillared doorway. From the rocky heights above, the woods rushed down as if threatening to immerse the dwelling with their verdure; they inclosed the handsome façade like billows of green velvet setting off a gem of amber.

"Oh, what a place to own!"

"At least," laughed John Holland, "nothing prevents us from pretending that we own it."

For this was the villa that their host had rented.

While ascending the terraced staircase between deep flower-beds, they were sure that in another moment they should wake to find it all a dream. But the white vestibule, adorned with stone benches and the statue of a dryad, did not melt before their eyes. To the right, a large room showed walls of Pompeian fresco and a floor of polished marble, wherein were reflected a pianoforte, a harp, and some luxurious chairs and sofas. To the left, a billiard-table stood in the center of an apartment no less ample and attractive. Straight ahead, a wide doorway gave upon a pergola covered with an awning; and there, against the brilliancy of still another garden, a tea-table was spread amid some scarlet wicker chairs.

"Heavens!" gasped Mr. Goodchild, "this is positively salatial!"

"Not bad," John Holland assented. "Still, before we rejoice, we'd better see what's coming to us up-stairs."

But the girls wanted to explore the garden behind the pergola.

Inclosed by the interlacing foliage of lofty trees, overshadowed by a great cliff that formed the first titanic step toward the uplands, it resembled one of those retreats in the heart of the enchanted glen where fairies hold their court. Here some devoted gardener had given rein to a fancy bordering on genius. The boxwood bushes were clipped into shapes of delicate extravagance; the roses, coaxed round pliant sticks, twined in arches, squares, and circles; the grass-borders were tufted with forget-me-nots and pansies, in alternate clusters, like a procession of tortoises; the back-drop, so to speak, was a cascade that trickled over moss so pruned as to suggest a school of leaping fish. Yet such was the reticence and harmony of all these various conceits that the whole effect was less humorous than charming.

"As far as I can see, there's only one false note," John Holland remarked, and he pointed to a marble bust on a pillar in the center of the garden.

"I thought, sir, that you would find it inappropriate," said his servant, gravely, with an English accent. "Something elfin would of course be better, or at least, in a manner of speaking, a bit in Verrocchio's style? Ahem!" Recollecting himself, the man stepped back. While the Goodchilds stared at him in astonishment, he murmured, "The house-servants can easily remove it."

But the host approached this piece of sculpture for a closer look.

It was an old marble, perhaps an ancient one, the bust of

a woman with a majestic countenance. She was crowned with a garland of corn-ears.

"It seems to be a Demeter," said John. "I know it's not necessary to introduce you to her."

They were well acquainted with her. She was the sister Zeus and protectress of the fruits of the earth; her daughter was Persephone, who, while gathering flowers on the Nysian plain, had been borne away by a lover to the lower world.

"This Demeter seems unusually sad. Perhaps she's mourning for her daughter."

"But Persephone came up from the lower world at last," protested Thallie.

"Not yet, her mother says. Suppose, after all, we leave the poor lady here. Some day she might reward us with a smile."

So Demeter remained, sad-eyed, in the midst of that whimsical garden.

They soon forgot her.

Their bedroom windows opened toward the lake. In the morning they saw Dawn groping with her rosy fingers through the vapors of the heights. At night their last drowsy glance was toward Bellagio's twinkling lamps, which plunged their reflections deep into the water. While they dreamed, the snow-capped Alps, lying beyond the northern limits of Lake Como, sent down breezes that released into the air a fragrance blended of nature's innumerable perfumes.

And the saffron-colored sails went floating by as indolently as the days.

In this calm, cool retreat they often recalled the heat of Florence, the stress of those past months, the unhappiness that they had been forced to bear together with that Tuscan beauty. Before their minds' eyes rose the pension garden, the theater of so much distress: they marveled that they had

been satisfied so long by its restricted charms. When they looked at the silver paper-cutters, decked with tricolored ribbons, which Mme. von Schwandorf had given them as keepsakes, they could not revive the melancholy of that parting. They wondered if it was because a pointed gift broke friendship.

Usually they took dinner in the pergola. The square table was illumined with candles in orange-colored shades; the crystal bowl in the center overflowed with flowers. The girls sat opposite each other, between John and Mr. Goodchild. The servants, their faces obscure above the line of candle-light, came softly to one's elbow with a silver dish, which was bound to contain something toothsome. When the fruit had been passed, there fell a silence, through which penetrated the trickling of the cascade. At a whispered word, John's man-servant stole into the house on a mysterious errand. A faint, rasping sound was followed by a metallic strain of music: it was a phonograph, arrived that day from Como. They heard the "Meditation from Thaïs." They thought, "If poor Aggie were here!"

Poor Aggie was just then listening to another sort of music — the squalling of a new-born baby.

In a big, wainscoted chamber at Twelve Chimneys, Devonshire, she lay on a four-post bed, her copper-colored hair in braids, her long lashes lowered on her alabaster cheeks. By her side stirred the tiny lump of humanity which was to justify the forgiveness of the Bellegrams, an oblation already pleading for her stridently. It was a boy, if anything so small could really be said to have that much significance; it contained, perhaps, besides a voice, a British heart.

Down-stairs, in the hall, where foxes' masks were nailed against oak panels, the baronet, teetering in his gaiters, slapping a riding-crop against his thigh, reflected warmly, "At

any rate, we'll breed this one up for the diplomatic service!" After all, are they so unfortunate who are destined to see their fondest hopes fulfilled not in their own lives, but in their children's?

Cyril came on tiptoe to the bedside, the collar of his Norfolk jacket rucked up about his ears, his black forelock dangling in one eye, his lean face, that face of a neurotic younger brother of Julius Cæsar, altered by a new sort of ecstasy. He a father, and she, the idol of his adoration, a mother! It was surely more than he deserved. It made him feel virile and religious; it gave him a sensation of importance. For the first time in his life Cyril Bellegram found himself a success. He had produced if not a masterpiece of art or literature or music or diplomacy, at least — with some collaboration, to be sure — a man!

He leaned over the coverlet to gaze at this chef d'œuvre. It failed to answer his proud look with any sign of obligation. Keeping its swollen eyelids pressed together, but opening its minute, yet curiously elastic mouth, it emitted a thin screech, as if proclaiming, "You will find in time that I am here on my own business!" But Cyril, perceiving on its bulbous little pate some wisps of black, considered, in his inexperience, with a dizzy joy, "By Jove! there's no doubt that it's a regular Bellegram!" Some day it would have a long black forelock dangling in its eye: the father, his fondness enhanced by the egotism natural to parents, would discern his image in the son.

He turned to Aggie, who gave him a glance, compounded of resentment and self-pity, that seemed to say, "Ah, yes, that's all very well; but if you only knew!" She suffered his embrace in silence. Her green eyes, which seemed to share the pallor of her face, scrutinized him steadily, as though she was asking herself if this could be the one on whose account she had endured so much. She listened at

tentively while Cyril, assured that nobody was by to hear his un-English sentiments, murmured in her ear:

"It's another beginning, an introduction to a deeper love. I can't find the words now to explain what I feel for you; but a day will come when I'll be able to make you understand, in a more poetic land, in Japan, where the wistaria covers a bridge like a picture on a fan, and a pool reflects the stone lanterns of the thingumbobs—the daimios. There we'll realize all our past dreams and many new ones. That time is only waiting now till you're able to travel. I've got my appointment: I'm to be vice-consul at Kobe."

Vice-consul! Not even a consul, then! And at Kobe, a wretched seaport far from Tokio, the capital, where women in long tulle veils and court-trains made their bows before a throne! On top of all her sacrifices, this news was the last straw.

But when Mr. Goodchild got word that a grandson had been bestowed upon him, he went rushing through the villa like a madman.

"Frossie! Thallie! It's a boy!"

"Really?"

"Eight pounds!"

"As little as that?"

"Good Lord! what would you have?"

"Well, we must cable her this minute."

"I should hope so! And write as well!"

But when Mr. Goodchild had finished his letters to Aggie and to Cyril, he was moved to dash off another, to the baronet.

One paragraph was as follows:

And you, sir, if I may allow myself the liberty of saying so, are to be handsomely felicitated as well, blessed as you are in your baronial mansion by that two-fold presence so touchingly blended!

In congratulating you, I give myself the pleasure of grasping your knightly hand with metaphorical grip across the seas. Shall I also admit, sir, that I envy you the present high privilege which you enjoy? But come, let me curb that emotion! Should I, who have had my dear daughter all her life, begrudge an honored relative, none the less affectionately regarded because so newly found, a little of the sunshine of her presence? In the words of Horace, "Tis hard, but patience mitigates what heaven forbids to change!" At least, on their way to the Empire of the Rising Sun—I speak of course of Japan—that precious trio, I venture, will come for a little while to me in Zenasville, Ohio. Then, indeed, it will be you who must lament their absence; and I, rest assured, who shall not forget to cheer you in your bereavement with another screed!

It did not occur to Aurelius that the baronet, with true British horror of exuberant familiarity, might consider this promise less comforting than threatening.

But John Holland, though as self-restrained, apparently, as any Englishman, never wearied of Mr. Goodchild's effervescence.

Sometimes, after dinner, if there were new books and magazines to interest the girls, the grandfather and the historian walked together on the road beside the lake. The stars, the glimmering water, the floating silhouettes of mountains, persuaded Aurelius to reveal himself completely. He unfolded the whole tale of his acquaintance with the International Star; he even told of that afternoon when he had wavered for a moment. He admitted that the buried treasure of Constantine Farazounis had tempted him, finally, more because of its intrinsic than of its archæological value. He ended by confessing that one day, in the Pension Schwandorf, he had tried to take a man's life. "There was provocation, never mind what, though at the time it seemed sufficient. But to think that I imagined all these years that I knew myself quite well! What am I? An amalgam of

the whole human race? Do I contain the elements of avarice, marital infidelity, and murder? The soul! Ah, awesome enigma! Or are such emotions merely the vapors of unreal things, clouding just for a moment the shining mirror of the eternal man, in which all souls might see themselves identically reflected?"

"I fancy we may safely call it that," John Holland responded.

"If Princess Tchernitza is right, if we return to earth many times to learn our lessons, why are we allowed such brief seasons here? I am growing old, yet I have so much to learn! Three-score-and-ten, says the psalmist. But an elephant is permitted to live longer, while an eagle reaches two hundred years, an alligator three hundred, a whale half a century! On the other hand, a dog is old at fifteen. Strange apparent inconsistencies! Do you know that in Great Britain and Ireland there are at least two million dogs, and not one case of hydrophobia?"

While John lighted his pipe, they stopped by the parapet which ran along the road beside the water. Out on the lake, invisible amid the liquid shadows, a boat was gliding, a young man was quavering a plaintive song.

"How old are those melodies?" mused Mr. Goodchild. "Do they descend through Rome, and Etruria, and Greece, from an antiquity more imposing than the walls of Troy? I can imagine the verses of Anacreon and Baccylides set to such airs and accompanied by the seven-stringed lyre."

And when they returned to the villa, he went straightway to the harp.

"A noble thing!" he exclaimed, after running his long, slender fingers over the strings. "It lends to the player a dignity not to be obtained with the violin, the violoncello, the guitar, the cithern, or the French dulcimer, though the latter was also held against the breast, and played, if I

remember rightly, with a pick." He sat down, embraced the harp, and groped for chords. In ten minutes he had discovered the theory of that instrument.

John started the phonograph; a rich soprano filled the room; Aurelius plucked a graceful obbligato from the harp-strings. But suddenly he stopped playing.

"Where have I heard that voice?"

"It's Bertha Linkow's. By the way, she's coming up to visit us."

Thallie, pretending to be deep in the new number of the "*Revue des Deux Mondes*," reflected, "To join her old flame!"

She noticed, however, that this news from Bertha Linkow did not excite John Holland. But, then, despite his constant sympathy and good spirits, he was such a baffling man!

Had she been mistaken that morning in the Florence railroad station? Impossible; in Cadenabbia she had received the same impression. No look, no word betrayed him; the belief came to her in a more subtle way than that. She was surprised at his continued reticence. It would be sad to refuse this kind friend who had done so much for her; yet would it not be sadder if he did not speak at all? Even those who find a "Yes" impossible do not like to forego the melancholy sweetness of a "No."

Probably he believed that it would be unchivalrous to declare himself while the Goodchilds were his guests? Or maybe he had concluded that he was too old to win her—though forty years, at close acquaintance, seemed to Thallie surprisingly companionable. Perhaps there was some tragedy hidden in his life, one of those unfortunate boyhood marriages, to an invalid in close seclusion or to a sort of barmaid, such as cropped up in novels, especially the English ones. Or could it be that Bertha Linkow herself had some hold on him?

Once, watching him closely, Thallie asked him to tell her of the prima donna's past. He did so without hesitation.

Bertha Linkow, as a child, had been one of a poor and numerous Saxon family that furnished the music at village fairs and weddings. In those days little Bertha played the violin, for the most part fortified by pumpernickel and small beer. Her talent, however, won the interest of a benevolent landowner, who placed her in the local conservatory. There for some time she studied the piano. But one day a vocal teacher — Rokitansky, in fact — heard her sing; in that moment her star of fate shone forth. With Rokitansky in Vienna, with the younger Lamperti in Milan, with Marchesi in Paris, she prepared herself for fame. In Paris, John Holland had met her. That same year she was wedded to the benevolent landowner, and became a widow in a month.

"But since then," John concluded, with a quizzical look, "she has managed to regain her spirits."

"I suppose she married him from a sense of obligation," said Thallie, not daring to raise her eyes.

"True, she was twenty, and he forty, at the time," responded Holland. "A middle-aged man, you see."

"Middle-aged?"

She stole a glance at him, and saw that he was smiling.

"At twenty she'd have been apt to think so. Do you remember a night in New York, in the supper-room of the Hotel Diedrich, when you looked at a forty-year-old stranger who was sitting near by and said, 'A middle-aged man like that'?"

Her face turned crimson.

"You heard it!"

"The music always stops at the wrong moment."

"The — light was bad where you were sitting."

"It was n't bad the next time I looked in the glass. Do

you know, Thallie Goodchild, that evening you gave me something new to think of. We seem to be a stupid lot, we men. In boyhood we feel we have all eternity at our disposal, an illusion that lasts much longer than you 'd suppose. Every morning, every night, in fact as often as we can manoeuvre to a mirror, we admire our reflections with the same self-complacency; we go on supposing that others see on our faces the same mask of eternal youth. But one fine day we overhear somebody say, 'The old man.' We look round us; no one else is near. At last we realize that we, too, are subject to the same alterations as the rest of human-kind. And most of us are quite bewildered by that little discovery."

"I did n't say 'old man,'" cried Thallie, clenching her fists. "And I was a fool even to say 'middle-aged.' It just shows what I knew at that time about anything. Forty? Why, that's what's called the prime of life."

"To be sure. Ask Frossie if there's not some euphemistic term for almost everything."

"Now you're making fun of me!" she retorted, with a catch in her voice; and she fled to her own room.

She had been diverted from her inquiries concerning Bertha Linkow. Had John Holland, divining that stratagem, deliberately confused her?

"If that's the case, it won't work again," exclaimed Thallie, clicking her teeth.

Possibly his valet had been with him in those romantic days? But it turned out that the gray-haired servant, who answered to the name of Brown, had been in John's employ only fourteen years. A British subject, he had once served as orderly to a major in the Duke of Cornwall's Fusileers. Standing before Thallie, with his heels together, he admitted that he should not have turned to valeting had there been no prospects, at the same time, of adventures.

"And what adventures have you had with Mr. Holland?"

"Why, Miss, from time to time, I may say, I've been fair fed up with them. We've got into some very strange places, Mr. Holland and me, and, what's more, if I may take the liberty, some tight ones. An archæologist does n't always meet with amiable native characters whilst going about in the East. And, then, there's been more peaceable occasions, but quite as exciting, when one comes to get the hang of them. For instance, at Tiryns, where we found the great treasure in the shaft-tombs—the gold diadems and cups and jugs and sword-belts and what-not, as is now in the Polytechnikon at Athens. And, besides, as one progresses in knowledge one takes a pleasure in what I call the adventures of the mind. I remember when we exploded Hick's book on the Homeric dialect; ah, that was a day, I assure you! Hick, as you know, Miss, thought the Homeric was composed in the Æolic dialect; it took us to show as how that could n't be,—quite the contrary, indeed,—coming as they really did from the Achean of the eleventh century B. C., the parent-langwidge of the Thessalian, Arcadian, and Cyprian. Quite a stir we made with that bit of news in what I call the learned circles."

"But your career with Mr. Holland has n't all been such hard work," suggested Thallie, half ashamed that she was trying to tempt a servant into an indiscretion.

"Oh, no, Miss, the life is n't all deserts and ruins and digging-gangs and such like. We've had our vacations, and very pleasant they was. If we've got a book finished, we do ourselves well somewhere on the Continent, though at present we're busy this long while on a new work, which Mr. Holland has probably mentioned to you, Miss—the 'Foundations of the Egypto-Roman Monarchy.' At the moment, howsomever, we don't seem to be making much progress with it."

"Mr. Holland is working now?" Thallie ejaculated, once more diverted from her detective purpose.

"Semi-occasionally, Miss; but only late at night."

That afternoon, when the others were down-stairs, she went out of her way to pass John's open door. She slipped into his bedroom.

She thought it a less attractive chamber than her own; at any rate, it was less cozily furnished. In one corner, on the floor of gray *terrazzo*, appeared some Indian clubs and dumb-bells; in another, a chest half filled with books stood open. A large table, beneath a drop-light, was covered with papers. But Thallie crept straight to the bureau.

The bureau was bare of photographs!

She turned to the writing-table. Timidly she picked up the topmost sheet of manuscript. While reading a few lines, she thought, "These words will some day be quoted everywhere; he will be praised and fêted on account of them. If Roosevelt were President, he'd invite him to the White House to discuss them." There came to her a fresh comprehension of John Holland's fame, which, by the way, had not yet reached its zenith. With parted lips, she contemplated the honors still awaiting him. Her gaze slowly swept this silent place, where, when his nocturnal labors were concluded, he turned off the drop-light with one of his deliberate, strong gestures. She escaped the room and her involuntary thoughts.

Of Frossie she asked:

"How many books do you suppose he's written altogether?"

"I should say a small Carnegie Library might possibly hold them all."

"Don't try to be smart! How many, really?"

"Why not ask him yourself?"

"A lot, I'll bet, for a man of his age."

"Of his age?"

"He's only forty."

For some moments Frossie was much engrossed with the tiny woolen jacket which she was knitting for Aglaia's baby. But soon, raising her serious and kindly eyes to Thallie's face:

"Nothing yet?"

"Nor probably won't be. It's all the better, perhaps. I'd only have to tell him it's impossible."

"Tell him, you mean, that you don't love him?"

"It might not hurt his feelings so much if I merely said, 'There's something that makes it impossible.'"

"And give him to think that there's another?"

"O Frossie, so it would! Then what am I to do?"

In an apparently indifferent tone, Frossie responded:

"Simply say, No."

"There's something so mean and hard about a simple No."

And Frossie, left alone, reflected, "I wonder if dad and I are going back to Zenasville without her."

September was nearly ended. Before long they should be on their way to the United States. An ocean would separate Frossie from the Florentine cemetery. She wondered if Baron di Campoformio would really see to the grave.

Then one morning as she was walking toward the town of Cadenabbia, just after a north-bound steamboat had passed up the lake, she saw the baron before her in the road!

He had come all this distance to obtain her pardon.

She could not turn away from him as he stood there bareheaded, his thin hair fluttering in the breeze. his weather-beaten face wearing once more its expression of appeal. On the stone parapet that edged the road above the water they sat down together, the young nobleman in his

wrinkled English tweeds, the young woman in her plain black dress. For a time he looked down miserably at his boots, while motor-cars, flashing past, enveloped them with dust. It occurred to Frossie that since she had thus far relented she ought to ask him to the villa.

But he refused that invitation; he intended now to catch the next boat down the lake. He only wanted to hear her say that she forgave him.

He had meant well all the while. In offering his aëroplanes he had tried to benefit Camillo. As for the cracked propeller-blade, he himself had flown with it two days before; he wished with all his heart that it had broken then. Now he had given up flying. Even the hangars were torn down, so that he need not see them from his windows. But the remorse remained. It might not be so bad if she understood his feelings.

Her eye-glasses seemed blurred, by the dust of passing motor-cars, no doubt. She removed them, to rub them with her black-bordered handkerchief. Though she knew that her eyes looked smaller when unprotected by those lenses, she was in no hurry to resume her previous appearance. She responded:

"I don't know why I acted as I did toward you. Naturally, I understand that you'd have given anything to prevent the accident. I suppose it had to happen. Apparently I was n't meant to be a wife."

"Someday, perhaps."

"I shall never marry now."

He stared for a while at her solid, sensible face, slightly freckled round the nose, and framed, beneath the black straw hat, in tresses of unusually emphatic red. No beauty was there, unless there is beauty in such healthy womanliness as suggests the light and warmth of a well-ordered home, the frolics of contented children, all the

gentle blessings that surround the normal hearth. And he sighed, did this sporting baron whose dead American baroness had been as delicately winsome as the companion of a dream, but too winsomely delicate to remain a wife. "You are young," he sighed, but he was thinking, "I am young, too."

Did she read in his face the secret that he had kept so well? She replied:

"The obstacle will not diminish as I grow older."

"The obstacle? Ah, yes; I suppose one can hardly hope that it will diminish, that obstacle."

"But remember," said Frossie, "we are friends again."

"If at any time — If I can ever be of service to you —"

"You can see that the grave is well kept."

"That I shall do, of course."

"Thank you. There's nothing else."

When Campoformio had left her, Frossie felt happier instead of sadder. "It really was not his fault." She was glad that he had come all the way to Cadenabbia to hear her say so. But had he come all the way to Cadenabbia just for that? It did not displease her to think otherwise. Oblivious to the passing motor-cars, she looked up at the sky and uttered: "As long as I live! Till I join you!" And she was also glad to think that there were others who might come to care for her, and whom she might refuse, thus proving to Camillo, wherever he was, her unwavering devotion.

AFTER Baron di C found that she had written a novel, which was the first of a woman widowed on her wedding day, repaired to her room to write. He believed that her style was superior to that of the woman he had married, and that she was acquiring more and more of her latest literary model, Ivo. He was sufficiently encouraged to let her write the script.

His verdict was:

"I think you're going to outdo me in yours."

Such a speech coming from him seemed faint praise; from Jolanda it seemed like a compliment. But he added:

"Understand, that will take a long time. You also have your long and arduous journey to make."

I believe that some day, if you stick unflinchingly to your ideals, you'll make a name for yourself. But tell me in so many words just what you want to be?"

"A realist, like Gustave Flaubert or Turgenieff."

"It's true that this is still the age of realism; but remember, the realistic style won't last indefinitely. The art of literature, too, is like a great revolving wheel in which no two adjacent spokes are of quite the same composition. Now there comes round to us work founded on observation, now work based on imagination; realism passes, romance appears; then, perhaps, a classic form takes shape; after that there's a reaction. In letters, every age has its distinctive method of expression. For us to say that in realism we've reached the final and best form, would be just as absurd as to declare that the style of painting will never change again."

"Thallie's Post Impressionists, for example?" asked Frossie.

"Oh, they are n't so ridiculous, Thallie's Post Impressionists! While extravagant themselves, they're going to affect all painting to a certain extent. The artists who thirty years ago hooted at Monet now show his influence in their canvases. The artists who to-day hoot at Matisse will show something of his influence thirty years from now. Perhaps literature changes less rapidly; but remember that it does change. Don't try to prevent yourself from changing with it, through admiration of Turgenieff or any other writer. Your Turgenieff was one of the pioneers of realism; from 1880 to the present is a long time for one artistic movement. In fact, a change is noticeable already. I said that realism is still with us; maybe I ought to say that it is changing from sheer realism to realism plus idealism."

"I had n't thought of that."

"But I see that in these few chapters you have already

grasped that fact instinctively. So if this new movement develops further in your time, you'll probably develop with it. Let yourself do so. In form, as well as in context, you should always express the moment, not by seizing upon ephemeral fads or modish mannerisms, but by working imbued with that contemporary impulse which gives Dante and Michelangelo and Milton their indestructible vitality. As Emerson said of the artist, 'Above his will and out of his sight he is necessitated, by the air he breathes and the idea on which he and his contemporaries live and toil, to share the manner of his time. That which is inevitable in the work has a higher charm than individual talent could ever give, inasmuch as the artist's pen seems to have been held and guided by a gigantic hand to inscribe a line in the history of the human race.'

"Big thoughts for me," murmured Frossie, with a startled smile.

"My prophecy is that they are not too big," was John Holland's conclusion.

But even after this encouragement there were times when Frossie made small progress with her work. Laying down her fountain-pen, gazing out of the window that opened toward the lake, she mused: "October! How well we should have known each other by this time! To-day I might have been sitting in some cozy little apartment near the cavalry-barracks and that tiny wool jacket, half knitted, might not be for Aggie's baby."

Sometimes, toward evening, there strolled along the road before the villa a beautiful lady, tall, slender, dark, accompanied by two Russian wolfhounds and an elderly domestic in a jet bonnet. Her face was sad, although her somber dress was elegant. Frossie called her the lonely princess. And once, when they passed each other in the twilight, the girl could hardly forbear to approach that pensive stranger

with the words, "Have you lost some one dear to you? So have I."

For Frossie found something mournful about Lake Como at evening, in those days of dying autumn, when the *Olea fragans* blossoms, and wood-smoke, and wet, rotting foliage spread their perfumes, and the Virginia creeper hung down in scarlet curtains, and the mountains, russet and lavender behind blue veils of mist, stood out between fading water and a fading sky, with here and there behind them the cold pallor of the Alpine peaks.

And then when the moon swam up above the lake, a radiance of extraordinary purity filled the sky. A reflection, a-shimmer like a heavenly pathway, spread out toward the farther shore, which assumed in the moonbeams the ambiguous loveliness of immortal places, such as the ancients said were the reality, the world being but the shadow thereof. But soon there drifted across that lustrous pathway, like a barque of souls, still too fond of their world of shadows to be allured by the eternally-actual beyond, a rowing-boat in which a young man warbled of love. For thereabouts it was always a young man who sang of love.

The tenor notes, flexible with an untutored grace, floated faintly across the ripples:

Ah, my Acacia-flower!
Believing in love is sadness.
Ah, beauty of melancholy!
But first let us taste some gladness,
For loving is such sweet folly!
Ah, my Acacia-flower!
Let love, let love play the gamin:
Life without love is famine,
Life without love is famine!

The song ended abruptly, as though over the lips that uttered it a kiss were hovering. Frossie closed her eyes. Did

...ing, however, that sh
by keeping everybody up a

And, indeed, an evening
about.

The nights were growing
to the music-room. There
through the French window
on the far side of the lake.
felt a craving for some enha
Linkow was easily persuaded
forte.

Then she poured out for the
voice, which others often had
In the midst of that feast Mr
feeling of unreality: could it
famous prima donna was exp
tones? How was it that su
lives?

But Thallie, watching Bern
joy of exquisite accomplishme
one sings like that, there's
room!"

words, "*Es treibt mich hin, es treibt mich her,*" and "*Mit Myrthen und Rosen, lieblich und hold.*" After that came *Amina's* aria in "*La Sonnambula,*" "*Come per me sereno,*" and *Elizabeth's* prayer in "*Tannhäuser,*" and *Isolde's* swan-song, and then, with a capricious change of mood, the lilting ditty that *Marguerite* utters at the spinning-wheel, "*Il était un roi de Thulé.*" Soon, a demure smile settling on her lips, she gave them a song by Tosti, "*Io son l'amore*":

"Aprite la finestra, o vago fiore,
Or che la notte è scura e il vento tace:
Aprite la finestra, io son l'amore,
Son venuto a rubar la vostra pace—"

Or as it might be in English:

Open the window, flower-face above,
Now that the night grows dim, the breezes cease!
Open the window! I who call am Love,
And I am come to rob you of your peace.
Now, cruel one, you have a frigid heart
From which my blossoming has yet to start;
Though if you'd feel the sudden bloom thereof,
But let me in, for I who call am Love.

Love has his wings, O Beautiful; each day
Those eager pinions learn new strength, until,
If at the door one thinks to bar his way,
How easily he gains the window-sill!
Open the window for an instant only:
I swear your heart shall never more be lonely;
For paradise is here, not far above.
Love does not lie, and I who call am Love.

The notes died away to four full chords; the abating vibrations seemed to penetrate Thallie's breast.

But Bertha could not sit still for long. She jumped up with a "*Holà!*" wound round her ample form a shawl with

step of an Andalusian co
marble floor toward John
the song which *Carmen* sir

"L'amour est e

She came close to him.
expected suppleness, she pl
smothered fire that was no
she trailed the fringes of her
passing before him, she took
her cheek, to draw it across l
on her hips, looking backwa
follow. And Thallie, quite
was the most barefaced pie
seen. It was small satisfact
ing after the exuberant temp
ing heartily at the perform
dignation, Thallie sat staring

But that prank brought tl
Linkow sank into a chair.

M- C

that the unrhythmic music of Richard Strauss was more irritating than pleasurable?

"All the same, my dear friend, that Richard has managed to describe some things new to music, with his so-called dissonances!"

"Pardon me," replied Aurelius eagerly, "if I offer my opinion on that point. One hears a lot about the descriptive power of music. But what stranger to Wagner would know that the fire music was meant to represent flames?"

"Here," cried Bertha. "You don't escape so easily from Strauss to Wagner! Is n't three-fourths of 'Salome' decidedly erotic?"

Mr. Goodchild returned:

"Who would have called a single passage in that opera erotic — since we have introduced the term — if he did not know the unfortunate text, or was n't under the painful necessity of viewing the action? In my opinion, music can merely make one sad or joyous, serene or tumultuous, or evoke reminiscences, as by a repetition of motives. As Henderson has said somewhere, it can call up martial thoughts by the employment of martial instruments, pastoral thoughts by dronings as from a shepherd's pipe, religious thoughts by deep harmonies such as a church-organ emits. It can express tranquillity, as in a symphony by Haydn, or mental disorder, as in 'Salome.' But until some one has made arbitrarily, and established firmly, a conventional musical expression for eroticism, there will be no way of telling eroticism from anger unless one is forewarned."

"Nevertheless," Bertha retorted, looking as if she would like to wink at some one, "Salome's description of the three races at dinner is pretty average good, *nicht wahr?*"

"Because we associate Egypt with weird minor strains, Judaism with eccentric jumping passages, and the Roman Empire with harsh, discordant blares in march-time. But

Good Heavens, on t
stance, in 'Tristan,' wh
impending! You know,
words, obtained by dividi

"Twenty-one," correcte

"I believe, ma'am, you
you're thinking of the intro
the effect of storm is produ
ensemble, to be exact, of
violas, twelve 'cellos, and f

Mme. Linkow threw hers

"*Ganz famos!* You tal
been a *Konzertmeister* also
most of your life at Wagner

"Alas, ma'am, I've never

"So? Then how come
tion?"

"From the scores, in the Z

"I resign," the prima do
immediately!"

And she demanded that
one of his

recollection. But he consented to deliver the lines of *Claude Melnotte*, on *Pauline's* arrival at the cottage:

"Pauline, by pride
Angels have fallen ere thy time: by pride —
That sole alloy of thy most lovely mould —"

Striking an attitude in the midst of that friendly circle, quite unembarrassed, in fact enjoying himself immensely, he seemed to attain the lyricism of youth as he pronounced the words:

"I saw thee midst the flowers . . . a spirit of bloom,
And joy, and freshness, as if spring itself
Were made a living thing, and wore thy shape!"

Was it then that Thallie felt John's gaze come round to her?

But when Mr. Goodchild, exhilarated by applause, chose an encore from the fifth act of "*Othello*," a coldness passed through Thallie's limbs, although her face was burning, as there resounded from the walls:

"It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul,—
Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars! —
It is the cause."

She was glad that after this selection she could say good night.

Aurelius, however, was now too much excited to retire. He went out with John Holland for a walk along the lake-side. There he told of that ambition of his boyhood, to become another Irving, a second Edwin Booth. Then, in a sadder tone, he spoke of the former aspirations of the three Graces. First Aggie had lost hope, then Thallie. When would it be Frossie's turn?

ing in their hearts a lov
they have refined their
merely to be able to
works."

"That's so," Aurelius
too, in a way, have failed i
that I shall be allowed and
Zenasville."

And now few days pass
mention Zenasville. To al
land devised excursions.

In a motor-boat they we
to buy souvenirs in the arc
tea on the sidewalk, and to
grown steps wound up bene
fragrant thatch, they stood
skirts, barefoot, bending be
inverted cones. Ahead dar
smile of impish officiousness
impossible to find the view.
piece of silver into his hand

" . . .

But his manner, no matter whom he encountered, seemed always suitable, was invariably sympathetic, never failed to win a confidence, or a laugh, or at least a shy smile of approval. The withered crones who gathered faggots showed their toothless gums at his gay greeting, and called after him a blessing. The young boatmen of the lake found nothing strange in telling him their troubles, nor did they frown when he complimented their sweethearts. Now and then the face of one of those responsive Latins brightened at the mere sight of him. For there was about him a quiet sincerity, an unostentatious warmth, a kindliness that reached one before he smiled or uttered words. What other riches of temperament, Thallie wondered, lay hidden beneath the calmness that had so long invested him, that still cloaked him too effectively?

One day they went to Lugano. At Grandola, in the hills between Lake Como and Lake Lugano, they saw on the station platform young Englishmen in golf suits, bare-headed, with scarfs of knitted silk wrapped round their chins. One of them, recognizing John Holland, came forward to shake hands. His was much the same kind of short-clipped speech that had distinguished Reginald Dux; he had the same air of being on excellent terms with himself and all the world. Thallie watched him with a feeling of resentment. Besides, she thought him insufferably youthful.

Sometimes they went for a picnic in the uplands. The lunch, produced from wicker baskets, was served on a tablecloth spread over the grass beside a waterfall. The repast finished, Bertha Linkow wanted to climb a nearby peak; John volunteered to drag her to the top or die in the attempt. Those two set out for their adventure, the singer trilling like a bird, the historian sauntering beside her carelessly.

in New York, where th
Holland.

“ Well, Humbert ! ”

“ Mr. Holland ! Mac
Monsieur ! I have the v
roses quickly ! Ah, Mr.
The chef will enjoy himse
over John’s shoulder he t
fresh caviar has just arriv
green limes ! A *filet de sa*
is right ; a *mousseline de sô*
Escalopes de riz de vea
Perdreaux truffés with chic
like a poem ! For a sweet ?
we could make a *poire Gaill*
good ; for the ladies mine
usual half-bottle of Clicquo
stood ! Immediately ! It r
land shall see how his name

Thallie, as she listened to
insignificant. John, as it se
lman

made statesmen grin; who might undoubtedly have been surrounded at this moment by the élite of any European capital, yet sat here well content to entertain the Goodchild family. "Is it really on my account?" thought Thallie. "But what can he see in me?"

She stared round her at the adjacent diners. Pretty foreign ladies in evening gowns were letting their smooth shoulders droop forward toward the light of candles. Their charms were completed; their faces subtly expressed a knowledge which Thallie, for all her poring over books, had never even glimpsed; there was about them a rather disturbing suggestion of having lived fervidly. And their bright, wise eyes, gazing askance at John Holland, were filled with a look of mingled admiration and respect.

They could hardly have known, by name or reputation, this big stranger indifferently clad in homespun and a soft collar, whose face was not handsome, whose manner was unpretentious. Still, was it not possible that they discerned in him a certain strength which appealed to their intrinsic weakness, while at the same time their experienced natures divined, despite his forty years, beneath his appearance of sang-froid, a temperament quite capable of subjugating their intensely cultivated ardors? It was rather a shock to Thallie to realize that a girl who fell in love with him, and felt free to accept him, and was given the chance to do so, might after the wedding have other women to watch beside the prima donna.

But she ought to have known as much! All those goings about, as Brown said, on the Continent! It was n't likely they'd let him alone, especially when they found out who he was. Well, she pitied the one he married: they'd keep her awake, these snaky, fashionable creatures! And Thallie conjured up scenes of which she — to take some one whose feelings she could readily imagine — was the ur

happy heroine. There rose before her visions of outings all spoiled by women, in Paquin dresses, who tried to flirt with him. For he, accustomed to those creatures of complicated charm, would soon tire of a simplicity like Thallie's. He would repent of his bargain as soon as she had shown him all her poor little stock of tricks. He would long to regain the old days, to resume an affair of the heart with some great lady as alluring, though without the same high principles, as *Madame d'Aranjuez* in "Don Orsino." She would be an exotic beauty indefinitely suggestive of orchids, tigresses and Spanish waltzes; in a long-chair on the balcony of a house above the sea she would let her white, aristocratic hand hang down where he could find it, while murmuring in his ear, "I thought I had been happy for the last time, till that night when I saw you standing in the doorway of the duchess's ballroom!"

Nor was Thallie able to think less of John, despite the "affairs" with which she now cluttered up his past. On the contrary, at thought of those imaginary women she felt the chagrin of a naïve nature, which would like, all at once, to be a trifle sinuous itself. Was it youth that made her powers of allurements seem to her so meager? Time, however, might possibly develop her? Who was it, George Moore, that had written so wickedly and fascinatingly about the woman of thirty? "Perhaps if I were a woman of thirty, I might feel on safe ground, supposing I married a man like him, and provided he asked me, and I felt free to do so."

It always came back to that: she did not feel free to do so, anyway. Reginald had not really passed out of her life; his shadow even lay across the future.

One day she read in the "Paris Herald" of the arrival from New York of Mr. Hector Ghillamoor and Mr. Reginald Dux. She tore the newspaper into shreds and

hurled it into the fireplace. "But that did me precious little good," she admitted afterward to Frossie.

They were in Frossie's bedroom; they had just shampooed each other's heads, and now they were drying their hair in the October sunshine. The long tresses, on the one hand the most vivid shade of auburn, on the other that softer hue loved by Titian, hung down in front of their flushed faces. Leaning forward in their chairs, their white arms slipping out of the wide sleeves of their kimonos, they rubbed their hair energetically with Turkish towels, and continued the unpleasant conversation through those fluffy tangles.

"It seems to me, Babykins, that all this must have happened to others, and that they managed somehow to be happy, notwithstanding."

"That may do for folks that have no consciences. Besides, it would all come out in the end. And meanwhile I'd be waiting on pins and needles for that day, like those women in Ibsen, or some other old Scandinavian gloom, who go moping round in slinky dresses, with big, black circles under their eyes, expecting the lightning to strike 'em."

"I don't mean that one should keep a secret, dear. That is n't my idea of a happy marriage. I think that, to be happy, one must start honestly; that it's a partnership bound to go to smash if one member begins by holding out something on the other. But don't you think that a good man — a man who knows a lot; for instance, one like Mr. Holland — would find, let's say, some extenuating circumstances?"

"You never read of such a case," said Thallie, dismally. "They always, you know, recoil."

"I'm not talking about characters in Victorian fiction, but about people in real life to-day — and, for that matter, any other days, I guess. If he really loves you, I think he'll

understand. Are you still sure, Babykins, that he does love you?"

"Darn it!" wailed Thallie, leaping to her feet and tossing back her tawny mane. "You make me frantic! No, he does n't! I was a fool to say so. Now are you satisfied? Why should he? A man like that can pick and choose. He probably thinks I'm a kind of funny little thing, and that's all. It's about time for Zenasville, anyhow; and I'll go my way, and he'll go his, and I don't care how soon it happens!"

"Do hush, Thallie! With all the windows open!"

"Good land! You don't suppose —"

She rushed to the window and stuck out her head.

Below on the terraced staircase, between the deep flowerbeds, John Holland and Bertha Linkow were descending side by side toward the gate. They did not look back; but had they heard, were they aware of the young face, surrounded by a nimbus of bright, tangled hair, which peered down at them aghast? That could not be; for on the second landing of the staircase Bertha, turning to John, whispered something tenderly. And with the words, she put her arm round his neck, drew down his head, and kissed him on the cheek.

Thallie dropped heavily into the nearest chair. Soon, her voice quivering, she said:

"Well, Frossie, I was right in my suspicions. She's got him back again, on her very last day here, with all that singing and *Carmen* stuff and the rest of it. At her age! She must be much older than he. I think it's almost disgusting. I'm not going down to lunch. You can tell them I've got a sick-headache. And so I have."

She pulled down the blinds in her room, kicked off her slippers, and rolled into bed.

It was a perfect day; the plan had been to spend the

afternoon at Bellagio. Thallie persuaded Frossie and her father to go without her. Toward three o'clock they set out in the motor-boat with Bertha Linkow. John Holland was not with them; he had said that he should probably write a page or two in the "Foundations of the Egypto-Roman Monarchy."

But at four o'clock he sent this note to Thallie:

You'll be much better for some air. The boat has come back; we might take a turn on the lake. I want you to see Varenna. I hear that something funny has happened to it to-day.

As if she were in a mood for something funny!

It never occurred to Thallie that she was free to decline with thanks this ill-timed invitation. She struggled out of bed, bathed her face with cold water, and wretchedly put on a filmy coffee-colored dress with pale-green polka-dots. Her newly washed hair was refractory; at one moment, leaning against the bureau, she was ready to give up her efforts, and shed a river of tears. Finally, however, she pinned on a broad-brimmed hat of yellow straw, and trailed her parasol down-stairs. John greeted her with a gentle smile.

"Still feeling so badly?"

"Worse, I think."

He was heartless enough to reply:

"This trip won't do you any harm."

They went down from the villa, crossed the roadway to the landing-steps, and entered the motor-boat, which set off across the lake toward Varenna.

His suit was of a rough, light fabric faintly mixed with blue; his hose, disclosed as he leaned back on the leather cushions with crossed knees, were the same shade as his blue cravat, transfixed with a pin of lapis lazuli.

"But everything about him always looks just so," she thought, with a lump in her throat.

Small pink clouds, of an irritating regularity, were mirrored in the glassy depths. Every moment the motor-boat seemed about to penetrate the reflection of the opposite heights. Varenna, a village diagonally climbing the steep slopes, expanded till one could count the windows of its houses. It did not seem different from any other lakeside village.

He who drove the motor-boat was an old man in a blue jersey, a scarlet sash wound round his waist over his crinkled trousers of white duck. Lame from childhood, and so immune from military service, he had never been off the lakes, but was vaguely aware that somewhere to the south there lay a place called Rome, where the king resided in a house even finer than the Villa Carlotta. Naturally, he knew no English. In fact, he had his doubts that persons who spoke such a language really understood one another, any more than the birds that twittered in the fig-trees and had no souls. For that matter, it was improbable that his passengers had souls worth mentioning, since undoubtedly, like all foreigners, they were heretics. It was rather a pity that the young one should have to fry in hell through all eternity.

But the old man did not bother himself for long about that question. His engine was running well; the sunshine had something of a summer warmth; at Varenna he would certainly be asked to drink a glass of wine. Huddled in his seat, his horny hands resting on the wheel, his body shaking to the vibrations of the boat, he fixed his rheumy eyes on the water and dreamed as if alone. And so to all intents and purposes he was; and so were John and Thallie.

"What's funny about Varenna?" she asked at last, with an effort.

"I understand it's suffered a curious relapse," was all that John would say.

They alighted at the steamboat wharf, behind which stood a small, white tavern almost foundering under the title, "Grand Hotel of the Lake." To the right, a rough-paved roadway, parallel to the shore, ascended toward the village.

On each side the high stucco walls were overshadowed by foliage of a ruddy tinge. Here and there a rustic loggia, roofed with poles, surmounted a humble house bedaubed with ocher. Ahead, the cobbled thoroughfare climbed to the town piazza.

But suddenly down that steep way between the ocher-tinted walls came tripping two young women of bewildering appearance. They wore steeple-bonnets from the points of which long veils floated out behind. Their sweeping gowns of gay-hued brocade were cut in a style that had been obsolete for more than four hundred years. From the hems of their skirts, trimmed with variegated fur, peeped out at every step long-pointed velvet slippers sewn with pearls. In fine, one saw in the flesh two merry ladies of the fifteenth century.

A laugh made Thallie look up at the trellised loggia above her head. Leaning over the rail, with a mischievous grin for her amazement, was a young olive-skinned gallant with bobbed hair, gotten up in a sugar-loaf hat, a damask jacket with enormous sleeves, and black-and-red striped tights. He looked, thought Thallie, as if he had just stepped out of an old painting.

"What in the world!" she gasped.

"I told you Varenna had suffered a relapse. Decidedly it's slipped back into the past. Look yonder."

John pointed up the street. The town piazza was suddenly filled with steel: men-at-arms, in kettle-pot helmets and breastplates, began to flow down over the cobbles beneath a thicket of lances. As they drew near, to a clanking like the racket of a hundred copper-shops, one saw that

in fluted armor.

"Pardon me, is it possible for a famous condottiere from the mines?"

"Signore," responded the man with a courtesy, but with a twinkle in his eye, other than *Oddo di Vespaio*, a character, from the pages of the famous writer of scenarios for the ruined tower on the hill I had called an excellent tragedy to be entitled *tevesmi*.' Wait, do I call it *tevesmi*, perhaps, because I am not through the heart. To tell you the seventh time to abduct the girl yonder, descending the street called *Simonetta* — in the play — with a fresh face and expression destroyed me in fair combat with the innamorata. There he is now, head. Apparently the third

charming ones, which we poor, prosaic moderns are fortunate to meet. Did I hear you mention the Grand Hotel of the Lake?"

"The tavern by the water, where we expect to dine before vanishing into thin air. That is, into the steamboat which takes us on our way to Milan."

"The Grand Hotel seems suddenly attractive."

"Why, Signore, if you and your lady would condescend to have a bite with us?"

"With pleasure," said John Holland, promptly, "on this condition: that you and *Simonetta* and *Ginevra* and *Raniero* and so on be our guests. It's only proper that we should entertain you, since we are, if not in our own house, at least in our own century."

"There's logic in that," the long-nosed knight admitted; "and I can accept the more easily since I happen to be the manager of the company. *Raniero!* Come down here; this gentleman and this lady have been so kind as to invite us all to dinner. *Simonetta! Ginevra!* They have gone on. Let us follow. Ouch! Signore, did you ever try to promenade in armor?"

"Once, at a ball, as one is apt to do in the fantastic days of youth. I went in a tilting-suit made by Tomaso da Missaglia of Milan in 1450, very nearly your own time, Sir Knight. It weighed thirty kilos, so I did n't dance. The vizor got locked, so I did n't sample the refreshments. I went home many hours before I was expected; the house was empty; I waited in hopes that a burglar would come in through the window with a kit of safe-breaking tools. That night, I believe, I was cured of trying to be romantic."

"Ah," exclaimed the wicked knight, *Oddo di Vespaione*. "Romance! What a jade! When we seek her, she is not there. When we least expect her, she is suddenly with us. Romance is like a cat: she is not to be coaxed; she comes

They descended to the
sent off the motor-boat, w
dining in Varenna.

The dining-room of the
apartment the white walls c
by leaks, furnished with ro
ing a gaudy chrômo of K
proprietor, with the assista
moved all the tables toget
Round this, at last, the com
to change their costumes.
to put off this finery of long
other, they appeared like be
esting sort than ordinarily.

John sat at the head of the
and the fair heroine *Simone*
of the board, the long-nosed
least escaped his fluted brea
bers of the troupe in order
bottles and carafes there lean
in shocked wigs and head-d
D-

lusion as though, by a miracle, one had gained the good old days, which in retrospect seem to contain nothing less inspiring than chivalry and love. The sun, sinking behind the peaks across the lake, sent through the window its last horizontal rays, red as the damask jacket of the young gallant *Raniero*. Then the quaint figures all swam in such a splendid mist as envelops the characters of Froissart. And the tureens of *minestrone*, borne in aloft through the doorway by the draggle-tail waiters, seemed like those bowls of noble soup, to which roes, wild boars, and peacocks had yielded up their juices, that once appeared from behind the screens of medieval banquet-halls, to the music of horns and rebecs.

But besides the *minestrone* there were grilled trout and *goni* fresh from the waters of Como, and a *risotto milanese*, and cutlets stewed in wine and flavored with rosemary, and salad in bland oil and rosy vinegar, with figs and half a dozen kinds of cheese. The glasses were often emptied; fresh bottles appeared; the chatter grew in volume; every one was jolly except Thallie. She was thinking, How I could appreciate this adventure if I had n't looked out of Frossie's window this morning!"

He seemed to her like a magician who with the wave of a wand had conjured up these characters. She reflected that he could, if he wished, fill life with no less charming episodes; she imagined countless delightful adventures that his fancy could provide for one who became his wife. But, after all, would such a lucky girl not be happiest when the play scene was ended, when silence replaced the chatter, and so, left alone, turned to smile into each other's eyes? Without looking at him, she visualized his person, nowadays so familiar; alas! all too congenial. And it was the misery of hopelessness, instead of the old revulsion from masculine approach, that penetrated her breast when she pictured

the dim hall of such a house as he would choose to live in, where, after the laughing guests had gone, he put his arm about her, touched his lips to her kindling cheek, and led her up a wide staircase that it was no effort to ascend, to the quiet of a boudoir say in the style of Louis XVI.

And these thoughts were all the more painful because, at this dinner, she evidently shared with him the credit for the hospitality.

In fact, *Oddo di Vespaione*, rising with a flourish of his wine-glass, shouted:

"To the health of our host and hostess! May they always be happy!"

"Thank you," said John. "For my part, I'm very much so now. What's more, to-day a little bird told me something that seems to assure me of happiness for some time to come."

"He means," thought Thallie, "that moment on the steps with Bertha Linkow."

And she wanted to jump up, to run out of the room, to lose herself in the gathering darkness forever. It was not kindness, but cruelty, that had lured her into the midst of this merry-making, which celebrated another woman's triumph!

"Then this is almost a festa," cried *Simonetta*.

"Entirely a festa," he assented, with the laugh of a boy.

Indeed, his face was lighted up with an elation that made him strange to Thallie: it was as if, in his place, she saw some younger brother, full of the joy of youth, with youth's incapacity for looking inscrutable and celebrated; expansive, reckless, almost handsome. The jokes that he bandied with these knights and ladies raised roars of laughter; all faces continually turned back toward him as to a sure source of mirth. The fair *Simonetta*, making the mistake of swallowing a mouthful in the midst of one of his remarks, had to

have her back pounded by the friar who had married her to *Raniero*. Tears ran down the cheeks of the faithful maid *Ginevra*, and a stout old woman, attired like the nurse of *Juliet*, began to utter barking cries of anguish:

"Enough! Enough! This is killing me! I've burst my bodice-strings!"

The waiters brought in candles and fresh bottles of Chianti. *Simonetta*, after her fit of choking, had the hiccoughs. *Raniero* proposed, as a friendly act, to slip the door-key down her back. *Ginevra*, with a tightening lip, suggested that ten swallows of water was a better remedy. This raised another laugh.

Raniero and *Ginevra*, it appeared, were contemplating marriage. They were waiting only till they had put aside a little money: in matrimony a time might easily be foreseen when *Ginevra* could not act. Still, it was hard to wait. One learned, indeed, that among the knights and ladies high odds were offered that one of these fine days *Ginevra* and *Raniero*, forgetting all prudent maxims, would run off to a priest like mad. Somehow the autumn in Italy affected one very much in the same manner as the spring!

"And the summer and the winter seem to have similar properties!" vouchsafed the friar, wagging his tonsured pate satirically.

So they fell to discussing love, and there was no doubt that they approved of that phenomenon. Even *Oddo di Vespaione* had a word of commendation for it, while the fat old dame attired like the nurse of *Juliet* wheezed forth, "Ah! yes, it is good!" And she fixed her eyes with a sort of anile rapture on the chromo of King Victor Emmanuel II. Meanwhile *Raniero* and *Ginevra* sat listening, hand in hand, he, with his olive cheeks and velvet eyes, so richly dark, she, with her creamy skin and yellow Lombard locks, so delicately blond.

Simonetta, on the other hand, was a willowy brunette, with ripe, red cheeks, snapping eyes, and a mouth like a poppy. Turning to Thallie solicitously, she asked:

"The signora is not feeling well?"

"It's nothing," said Thallie, nervously raising her left hand to her cheek. And all at once the company perceived that the third finger of her left hand lacked a wedding-ring.

For a moment, even among these Latins, instinctively so tactful, there fell a silence of surprise.

Thallie, for her part, did not understand the reason for this hush till John remarked:

"Ah, my friends, at last you have seen something, or, rather, nothing!"

Simonetta quickly replied:

"It is no less a pleasure to find that our hostess is the sister, instead of the wife, of the signore."

"No," said John, "we are not related in that way, either." And as every one sat motionless, trying to smile in an encouraging way, he added quietly, "But in such good and sympathetic company I don't mind telling the secret. It is this, that we are in almost the same state as *Ginevra* and *Raniero*."

There was no doubt that for a second or two Thallie's heart stopped beating. Attempting to move, she found herself paralyzed by what seemed fright, yet could hardly be that emotion. She discovered that her mouth was open, and tried her best to close it: but it twisted into all sorts of curious shapes. She was vaguely aware of a clatter of applause, of graceful speeches flung at her like garlands, of a large, firm hand that closed on hers under the ragged tablecloth. She heard John saying:

"At first we hesitated on account of a certain disparity of age. When one is twenty and the other forty, one is likely to be only thirty when the other is fifty."

"You, Signore?" cried fair *Ginevra*, indignantly. "You will be young at sixty! You have the very complexion of my father, who was sixty-one when I was born. Do I look as if that marriage had been a failure?"

And, indeed, *Ginevra* was what might be called a personal success.

"Ages!" echoed *Simonetta*. "I was married at fifteen; my husband was forty. To-day I am twenty-two and happier than ever."

Whereupon, springing to her feet, she sped down the room, to throw her arms round that wicked knight, the long-nosed *Oddo di Vespaione*.

All the troupe clapped their hands, like an audience applauding a fine scene at the play.

"So you see, Signore!"

"Oh, yes," John assented, "in the end we, too, concluded that the present was worth as much attention as the future. For, after all, in life we are sure only of to-day." And turning to Thallie, he whispered, "Is n't it so, that we're reasonably sure of to-day?"

She lowered her head till her wide-brimmed hat was all that could be seen. But presently her hat bobbed up and down once, twice, in timid assent.

The rest was like a dream. The dinner over, the steamboat nearly due, it was time for these characters out of the fifteenth century to melt away. Their brocades and armor shimmering in the candlelight, their teeth flashing in sympathetic and admiring smiles, they crowded forward to utter, in soft, musical tones, their thanks for this entertainment. Then a shout from the doorway, "The steamer's in sight!" sent them flying up the stairs to change their costumes. The dining-room was empty except for John and Thallie and the draggie-tail waiters.

"See," said John, "they've vanished into thin air. They

And with that call wa
Oddo:

"Good-by! It was on
preferred that young ras

The motor-boat had re
in it. The lights of Var
lake stole forth to embra
sheen began to spread at
moon. A strong arm enc
arm that had caught her
tumbled down the last fl
With a sob she pressed h
of his coat, which smelled
But the old fellow who dr
a glance to those two heret
the lakes; it was not the
such a tableau, in the ever
Besides, he was thinking of
drink at Cadenabbia.

"No," she quavered at
something —"

A — .

long sigh, nestled closer. She felt so grateful, and so safe in that embrace! Indeed, she had never felt like this before. All the rest of her life she was going to be protected. She should go with him into the deserts, yes, and into many of those fashionable restaurants as well; and a little of his celebrity would be refracted upon her. She should have all the fame she needed; this was better than becoming a great painter. This was what she had been made for—to be loved, to be guarded, to adore somebody who was stronger than she. Was it not really more than she deserved?

“What did you ever see in me?” she faltered.

“I suppose,” he replied, “living with yourself as you do, you’ve never realized that there are very few of your kind left?”

They ascended the terraced staircase to the villa. Dinner was over; the others were in the music-room; the door was shut. Thallie remembered Bertha.

“What will she say!”

“Who?”

“Madame Linkow.”

“Probably sing some nice, foolish little song to indicate delight. She’s had time to think of one. She congratulated me this morning when we were going down the steps below Frossie’s open window. Good old Bertha! The world’s full of excellent people, is n’t it?”

He swept her through the hall to the pergola.

The garden, inclosed by great trees, was not yet illumined by the moon. The cascade rippled behind a veil of shadows; the boxwood bushes eccentrically clipped, the circles and triangles of intertwining roses, the borders of pansies pruned like processions of tortoises, were as ambiguous as the dreams of other days, or the whimsical expectations of a long-lingering, but finally retreating, childhood. Yet in the midst of that place, on the pedestal, shone forth in the first



CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

AURELIUS JOYFULLY OBEYS A PRESIDENTIAL PROCLAMATION

AND now no one could give Mr. Goodchild any sensible reason why they should not all return to the United States.

They bade Lake Como good-by. They stayed in Genoa only long enough to see the house where Christopher Columbus was supposed to have been born. On a gray morning — the skies were inclined to signalize that parting with some tears — the Goodchilds and John Holland embarked for America. A call at Naples, a swift tour of the city, from which they brought back a jumbled recollection of much grace and squalor, and they were off in earnest on their ten-day voyage to New York. The rounded slopes of the Campanian coast faded at last in a cerulean haze.

And so no more of Italy.

All the same, that was a pleasant voyage. The Mediterranean and the Atlantic, putting their heads together between the pillars of Hercules, connived at waves unusually placid for the time of year. Thallie, who had anticipated all the humiliating agonies of seasickness, found that she could appear every day before John with healthy cheeks and sparkling eyes. What a load off her mind! Suppose she had been forced to show him the face that she had worn for a while on the voyage from New York to Cherbourg!

For her, those days at sea slipped by like a season in the land of lotus-eaters, the past forgotten in the contentment of the present, the future sure to be only the enhancement

of this hour. All her old romantic visions, the fanciful images which adolescence forms, dissolved to reveal the reality that they had hidden; and though they, in their way, had all been beautiful, the reality was much more satisfying. As for that, had she not found at last in John, beneath the serene exterior which had so long misled her, a synthesis of those imaginary heroes not only of her girlhood, but also of the more mature times to come—a character, in fine, still imbued intensely with youth's ardor and imagination, but strengthened moreover by a force, a sympathy, a power of protection, that a more callow love could not possess? With a sigh, she resigned herself to many years of happiness.

And she who in Florence had vowed that she should never love again now felt gathering in her heart a passion not compounded merely of esteem and gratitude. In this daily adjacency, so suggestively the prelude to a more profound relationship, Thallie's shyness was replaced by an encouraging fervor. Indeed, it was as if that former infatuation had been but the jejune counterfeit of love, so little were the feelings which had prefaced its climax like these new emotions. Then, amid dancing lights and swimming colors, she had believed, "I cannot help myself." Now, stretched in her gently swaying berth, still wide-awake long after midnight, she admitted, "I do not want to." And the old disillusion gave place to ardent expectations in which lingering immaturity was changed to womanhood.

Yes, this celebrated historian was something of a magician!

She knew that all her life she should remember these nights on deck when he and she, of equal age at last, sat side by side, wrapped in their steamer-rugs. They were often alone, for Frossie had a way of strolling toward the stern, to stare out over the dim track of foam toward vanished

Italy. Mr. Goodchild, on the contrary, found his way forward, to peer through the shadows by the hour, as if at any moment he might glimpse the torch of Liberty.

Finally he did so, or, at any rate, he marked the light of Sandy Hook. And next morning the steamship crept into the harbor of New York.

On each side the great port unrolled its smoky panorama; ahead, between the broad rivers, the close-set sky-scrapers rose majestically in the sunshine of November. In those bright, clustered towers which formed one soaring monument, the voyagers saw expressed America's unique audacity and vigor, that startling beauty which owed nothing to antiquity. They felt a pang of pride and adoration; they were filled with awe while gazing on this splendid symbol of their land. As they looked intently at the nearest flag, Mr. Goodchild was heard to quote:

"When Freedom from her mountain height
Unfurled her standard in the air
She tore the azure robes of night,
And set the stars of glory there!"

"Children, just think of it; we're home again!"

Yet when they had landed, America was strange to them.

Everything appeared unnaturally clear-cut and bright, as though the sunshine of the New World, while paler than that of Italy, was more intense. An unnatural energy seemed to urge the traffic of these teeming, brand-new streets. The voyagers found it strange that here everybody should be hurrying; there came to them an involuntary agitation, which they thought was due partly to the clamor, and partly to the invigorating air. In fact, the home-comers had hardly gained the shore before they also felt the need of hurrying. And yet they were going to be in New York for a fortnight.

John, so that they could have all the excitement possible in that time, ensconced them in the Hotel Diedrich.

What a fortnight that was!

For the girls, first of all, there were the department stores, so spacious and magnificent in comparison with the shops of Italy. Thallie learned, with a momentary dismay, that a sudden change of styles had caught her unawares: everything was now being made with a flavor of the seventies, the seventies having by this time receded sufficiently into the past to be no longer dowdy. One also observed that wider skirts were in vogue; there was, indeed, a "wide skirt walk," a kind of sidewise sway, which had to be acquired.

"But basques!" exclaimed Frossie. "And buttons all down the front! And little perked-up hats! I suppose the next thing will be those dinky carriage-sunshades!"

"What of that, if it's the fashion?" retorted Thallie, with a pirouette. "At least you might take that nice black dress we saw in Schubert's."

"I can't afford it. For you, about to get married, it's a different matter."

But Thallie refused to buy as much as a ribbon till Frossie consented to invest in one new hat and gown. She argued:

"Those things you've got on were obsolete in New York six months ago. Surely, Lovins, you don't want to look like an old maid?"

"Why not? That's just what I'm going to be."

But Frossie, though she clung to her black frocks, was not willing to spoil the pleasure of the others by refusing to attend the New York theaters.

At the problem-plays, one saw the poor misunderstood heroine who moaned, "Why should there be one law for a woman and another for a man!" One awaited breathlessly the last scene, wherein a dreadful state of affairs held

over from the "big act" was remedied in a manner that seemed reasonable till one had reached the street. At the musical shows, the same stately damsel warbled of the moon in June; the same industrious comedian bounced forward with his mouth full of quips too local to be quite intelligible; the same swarms of pretty girls changed their costumes a dozen times but always forgot to cover up their knees. At the comedies, one viewed again the desk, the telephone, the funny office-boy; one heard a clicking of typewriters and a commercial jargon; one witnessed, just before the final curtain, the moment of shamefaced sentiment.

And to think that every one talked English! At the opera, however, one could listen to Italian.

They heard Bertha Linkow sing *Gilda* at the Metropolitan. Afterward they went round to the stage-door to bear her off to supper. Their table in the supper-room at the Hotel Diedrich was the same that they had occupied one night, eighteen months before, when they had first laid eyes on John.

He, leaning closer to Thallie, said:

"Do I know what you're thinking of?"

"It seems so strange!"

"How well I remember my feelings when I saw you!"

"Even then?"

"From that very night."

"Oh, really, John?"

And now it was she, not he, as at Varenna, who reached a hand beneath the table-cloth.

Then one day, with just such an impulse as had been predicted of those two amiable young phantoms *Raniero* and *Ginevra*, John and Thallie decided that they could not exist any longer without being married.

It was a quiet wedding, almost as unpretentious as a runaway-match; it was over in five minutes. This time,

when the minister inquired, "Who giveth this woman?" Mr. Goodchild did not miss his cue. But afterward, as he was about to kiss his daughter, blushing in her street-costume reminiscent of the seventies, Aurelius looked at Thallie wildly. And he groaned in a breaking voice:

"John! John! Be good to her! Oh, how like her mother to-day!"

That same night Mr. Goodchild set out with Frossie for Zenasville, Ohio.

During their dinner on the train they found few words to utter; this tête-à-tête suggested to them too plainly that the Graces were no longer even two. But just before Aurelius tipped the waiter—he had learned to perform that feat almost as coolly and accurately as John Holland—Frossie said:

"At least, they'll all be with us for Thanksgiving."

"Yes, at least they'll all be with us for Thanksgiving."

In fact, this Thanksgiving day was to be distinguished by a family reunion. Thallie and John, their honeymoon finished in the South, were coming for a week. Aggie, Cyril, and the baby were expected to stop off, en route to San Francisco and Japan. Even Bertha Linkow had accepted the Goodchilds' invitation, although, as she was scheduled to sing at the Metropolitan on Tuesday and Friday, she had not promised to stay overnight in Zenasville.

"If she did," Frossie reflected, "I don't know where we'd put her. As for the others—"

"True," Mr. Goodchild assented. "Next year I shall have to knock together a species of annex. For, of course, as time passes there'll be more and more of us."

That night, Frossie lay for a long while awake.

Her adventure into the world was finished; a year and a half had brought her back to Zenasville. The others had escaped; she alone was destined to resume the old, restricted

life. But the others had failed to realize their dreams of art, while she was some day going to be at least a writer of renown. This was her recompense. Apparently one could not have everything one wished for.

Still, she had memories. In her spinsterhood, to which she was looking forward with an almost monastic courage, she should be sustained by the knowledge that a well-beloved man had loved her in return till his last mortal breath. In retrospect that passion took on splendor: if it had been fine in life, at the moment of death it had risen to sublimity. Gradually she had perceived, since hearts do not need extraordinary surroundings to gain kinship with the most famous of their kind, that she, too, had lived a tragedy intrinsically as memorable as any storied one. Yes, she, who had always felt herself inferior to her sisters in attractiveness, had played the most poignant drama of them all.

And this drama had changed her; she emerged from that furnace of tragic circumstance with all the dross in her consumed. Her youthful solidity of temperament had been welded into strength; her one-time fastidiousness had been refined into a wholesome comprehension of humanity's impulses. And if there remained in her a certain romanticism due to her heredity, that trait was now so well fused with experience as to be perceptible only as a sane idealism. Fortune, in short, while laying on her shoulders a heavy burden, had largely smoothed for her the way that led to fame.

She fell asleep dreaming that in some shadowy Italian place, set round with cypresses, she held up her first successful novel toward the stars, with the declaration, "We've made this, at least, together, you and I!"

Early next morning they arrived in Zenasville. Selina and Ira Inchkin were waiting for them on the station platform.

Selina's trivial blond prettiness was not more faded; Ira held himself as stiffly as ever in his baggy business suit. The hardware-merchant, perhaps in celebration of this return, had the back of his neck freshly shaved. His wife bore two bunches of poppy-mallows, which, in her onslaught upon Frossie, she crushed against the bosom of her gray silk dress, that historic costume for ceremonial occasions.

"But where's Thallie?"

"Married yesterday."

"Married! My conscience! Who to?"

But Aurelius, his legs trembling, was staring round him at the homely landmarks.

"Nothing changed!"

"Oh, yes there is," retorted Ira Inchkin. "Look yonder. My new Ford car!"

And in that vehicle they set out for the old home.

There was Maple Lane, its double row of trees denuded of their leaves, its dirt roadway cut into ruts by the wheels of wagons that had passed the week before. And there, at last, was the broken picket-fence. And now one saw the little yellowish house, the shingles slipping from its roof, the slats of its shutters tilted at all angles, the bell-knob of white china glistening beside the door of home. Mr. Goodchild rushed up the path, between the plats of the old-fashioned garden, which, instead of showing the neglect that one had expected, displayed in well-ordered clumps the lingering gayness of aster, leadwort, phlox, and red-hot-poker plant.

"We kept it up for you, all the flowers in their turn," Selina told Frossie, while pressing her handkerchief against her eyelids. "We knew you could n't stay away forever."

But Aurelius had burst into the house.

The odor of the ancient sofas, lambrequins, and tidies was like an elixir in his nostrils. He did not notice, as did Frossie, that these little rooms full of gimcracks

: strangely aged and shrunken. He stood still, in his wrinkled cutaway coat, the black felt hat pressed tightly to his breast, his fragile-looking, sanguine face a-gleam with pleasure. Suddenly, as if stung, he leaped through the garden, the kitchen-porch, the corridor, and gained the studio. He saw the walls decorated with sketches and medical diagrams, the fat cast-iron stove, the window-boxes where geraniums had bloomed. He fed his hungry eyes on the camera, the head-rest, the photographic screens beaded in gouache with elegiac landscapes. He touched the forte and writing-desk and easel, all the precious emblems of the past.

Of the past? Of the future also!

It is here that I shall make my mark even yet!"

And all his innumerable ambitions came surging up like a session of great waves, to dash against his brain. He seized with a confused impulse to throw down his gage on the floor, for the whole world to see. A moment later he was going up, outside the front-door of the house, the dilapidated sign inscribed:

Aurelius Goodchild, Esquire,

Interviews by Appointment.

Hereafter he grew younger day by day. He regained a youthfulness which he had never shown abroad. There came from his lips the quaint songs of past decades; he often turned Frossie to a serio-comic declamation that brought back her childhood to her. Then, sometimes, he would pose in the midst of his ridiculous gestures at recollection of his other daughters. Alas! at the lamplight hour in the parlour there were no more catches sung; there was no chiming of four voices to the tunes of "Three Blind Mice" and "London's Burning."

“ But they ’ll all be here for Thanksgiving! ”

And why should a congenital optimist look farther ahead than that?

He had, besides, many plans of the utmost importance to occupy his mind. There was his long-pondered invention to be perfected, the oscillating berth that was going to do away with seasickness. And now he should really have to finish the tragic poem. One morning, while reading it over, he discovered that after beginning with alexandrines he had switched to the pentameter line! He must have made that slip when distracted by Camillo’s death?

So much to do over!

It might be better to change the whole poem into another meter, such as Byron’s in “Childe Harold.” What could possibly be more moving than that form, as for example in the passage:

Ah, then and there was hurrying to and fro,
And gathering tears, and tremblings of distress,
And cheeks all pale, which but an hour ago
Blushed at the praise of their own loveliness;
And there were sudden partings, such as press
The life from out young hearts, and choking sighs
Which ne’er might be repeated; who could guess
If ever more should meet these mutual eyes,
Since upon night so sweet such awful morn could rise!

To be sure, Byron’s thoughts contributed to the charm. But Aurelius, recalling the precepts of Princess Tchernitza, exclaimed: “As for thoughts, I shall have as many and as good, if I just allow myself to come into free contact with the immeasurable supply that fills the universe!”

However, still another literary labor was foisted upon him. Dr. Numble had left a memorandum saying, “In case of my demise, I wish that my learned friend, Mr. A. Goodchild, shall see to the publication of my *magnum opus*;

viz, 'A Proof of the Soul's Transmigration, by One Who Remembers his Previous Existences.' " Aurelius, running over that bale of frowzy manuscript, computed that it would take a year or two merely to decipher Dr. Numble's script.

"Land sakes!" cried Selina Inchkin. "You're not going to take that seriously!"

"Yes, it must be done; for it's a sacred charge."

Ira Inchkin offered the opinion:

"You'd much better spend your time writing Selina a play. Something foreign and catchy, such as you must 'a' got the hang of from your travels."

"Yes," Selina echoed intensely; "but, mind, not like Euripides! Nothing that has to be put on in a stadium! It ought to be, say, the life-story of a woman who has suffered, a woman of the world, perhaps with a title?"

"Well, why not," Aurelius returned. "I have taken tea with contessas and marchesas in their *palazzi*; I hope I can delineate that phase of life as well as any other."

But his thoughts about literature were distracted by the imminence of Thanksgiving.

That was to be a sumptuous feast indeed. All day long, in the kitchen, Frossie was now assisted by a large, black mammy, a wizard with viands, who answered to the name Arbutus. The pots and kettles steamed continually; delicious scents were wafted through the house, and a clattering Afric laugh resounded amid the chopping of the mince-meat.

One day, when the plum-puddings were cooking, Thallie and John arrived.

The first greetings over, Frossie scrutinized the bridal couple narrowly. While John looked really youthful, Thallie seemed older than before. Was it her new attire, the modish violet-colored hat and gown, the scarf of soft fur wound about her neck, which gave her this air of a charming

young matron quite at home in marriage? As soon as the sisters were alone together, Frossie burst out:

"Good Heavens! where's my Babykins! Who's this fine lady, anyhow? And dressed so scrumptious! That scarf is n't — no, it can't be!"

"Russian sable."

"And a gold purse!"

"Yes, is n't it rather a nice one?" Thallie replied, unconsciously with so close an imitation of her husband's manner that Frossie smiled.

"And — aside from all this, of course — I suppose you're awfully happy?"

"So happy!" cried Thallie, in those tones of birdlike liquidity which came to her when she was suddenly and deeply moved. "So happy!" And, her fair cheeks roseate, she threw her arms round Frossie with that impulse, to hug and kiss somebody, by which girls deceive a bystander into thinking that the object of their caresses is receiving the congratulations. Then, as her happiness was of so complicated a quality that it could not be explained by words, she hid her face on Frossie's shoulder with the movement of a bashful child. And finally, when that silence was becoming tense, she pressed her puckered mouth against Frossie's neck below the ear and blew as hard as possible. With a scream and a shudder her sister jumped away. In this family Frossie had always been the ticklish one.

"You ought to be spanked for that!"

"Spank a married woman?" Thallie inquired, drawing herself erect with the haughtiness of a stage-duchess.

Yes, there was no doubt that love, though she had once renounced it in disgust, had, after all, proved to be quite satisfactory.

As for John, even the humble accommodations offered by the Goodchild homestead delighted him.

"So this is the studio! You underestimated it in your descriptions."

"I'm afraid," said Aurelius, "that your man Brown will have to sleep here."

"Did n't bring him. His outbursts are getting too erudite for a vacation. At Charleston, on our way South, he called my attention to a monument that he thought had been inspired by the archaic Greeks. Do you know, I suspect him of writing my biography on the sly. I'm feeling too much alive at present to enjoy the thought that my biography is being done, even by an ex-private in the Duke of Cornwall's Fusiliers."

When he was able to get a word alone with Frossie, John asked:

"Working?"

"Housework at present; but keeping a maid will relieve me of the worst of that. There's one thing that's bothered me since I came back to Zenasville: how can I find here as much material as I shall need?"

"I'll take precious good care that you don't grow fast o Zenasville."

"We're not rich enough to travel."

"You'll have more some day than now."

"But of course I must stay with dad; and I don't think I'll ever want to budge again."

"Give him time. One of these spring mornings he'll get the south wind up his nose, or see some roses on a wall, and wish for another little whirl in Italy."

Frossie looked up at John with a new light in her serious eyes.

"Do you really think so?"

"I know it. It's rather like malaria. I've got it, too. And you?"

"Oh, I!"

"Your future is hidden from me as well as from yourself, but I fancy it's going to be too big for this little house. Yes, I venture that more will come into it than even you yourself imagine."

Afterward, she wondered what he had meant by that.

The day before Thanksgiving, as Aurelius was standing on the door-step, gazing toward the horizon murky with the smoke of factory chimneys, a carriage came down the lane; an Irish terrier scampered up the path between the garden-plats. It was Bristles. Aggie and Cyril and the baby had reached Zenasville.

They had with them as nurse a Devonshire woman who was going to join her husband, a corporal of artillery, in Hong-Kong. This honest creature, instead of being disappointed by the house in Maple Lane, was highly gratified. Ever since landing in New York she had resented her surroundings, but here was America as she had pictured it.

Cyril Bellegram, as soon as he could extricate himself from the melley of embraces, sent round him a bewildered look. Aggie's home was not at all what one would expect from looking at Aggie. As he flung aside his dangling black forelock, his eyes met John's. Assuming as well as possible the expression of an English country gentleman, he got out, in staccato tones:

"Very decent, what? Pleasant property. Jolly little garden, I should judge, in summer."

Aggie, for her part, did not care two pins whether Cyril liked the little yellowish house or not. She felt herself able to make him see this place in any light she wished by means of half a dozen artfully selected speeches. In the end he always regarded things from the point of view that she wanted him to take.

But Aggie felt that she herself was under a more critical observation: it might need some finesse to make her sisters

think that this marriage was not virtually a failure. Looking at Frossie, she discerned the calmness of a maturity finer than her own. Turning to Thallie, she perceived a joy which all her own machinations had not brought her. How was it that she, while meaning to excel the others in every way, had missed the sad and glad experiences that seemed to have raised her sisters far above her? And it was Frossie, according to reports, who was going to be the famous one. And Thallie, who had never shown the slightest knack of getting round the men, was married to the celebrity of wealth and assured position, to just such a one as Aggie had dreamed of bringing to her feet! Was there such a thing as being too clever, too designing?

But her sisters took it for granted that Aggie was quite happy. As if one had a chance to be otherwise with such a baby!

They could not get enough of that baby. They knelt round Aggie's knees to peep into its face; they examined its tiny finger-nails with exclamations of wonder; when it smiled they crowed in triumph. Aurelius had to hold it. Then Thallie cuddled it against her bosom without daring to look up. But Frossie, when her turn came, lowered her eyes toward the baby's head with a look that would have made the fortune of a painter of Madonnas. A minute afterward they missed her from the room.

The baby, at Aggie's instigation, had been named Sydney Montmorency, after a wealthy, middle-aged bachelor in the Bellegram family.

When Sydney Montmorency, surfeited with petting, had been carried off to bed, the sisters went out for a walk. Once more, beneath the fading sky in Maple Lane, the three Graces locked arms; the Ohio afterglow again transfigured the faces of Aglaia, Thalia, and Euphrosyne. An affection enhanced by memories made them press still closer together.

Where the houses ended, and open country stretched eastward, they all stopped as one, to stare into the dusk. How much had happened since their last walk here!

"I suppose," said Frossie, "you got dad's check for your twelve thousand dollars?"

Aggie continued to stare across the country-side. The last of the twilight was gathered into her delicately chiseled face; her copper-colored tresses of the palest shade shared the luster of her skin. And her emerald-green eyes, which she did not hide this time beneath her lashes, took on a new look, at an unprecedented resolution. She replied:

"Poor Daddie! I'm going to give him back six thousand dollars of it. I would n't even keep half, except that Cyril and baby and I are n't as well off as we might be. But later on—"

She fell silent, looking into the eastern darkness as if into the future, where presently the sun was bound to rise again. Off there lay Japan, the field of a new conflict, in which life might still be made a victory. For she hoped so to permeate her husband with her own personality that in time he might be driven, like an automaton impelled by an external genius, up the heights of her ambition, after all.

It was dark when they turned homeward. At the gate they heard their father chopping wood for the cooking of Thanksgiving dinner.

Next day Bertha Linkow swooped down upon them.

In an instant the household was galvanized by a new gaiety. Out of breath from squeezing the three Graces, the prima donna sank into a chair, to fan her pink-and-white face with her hat. But those well-developed lungs soon stored up sufficient air for further outbursts.

"Where is that baby? You are keeping him from me on purpose; you know that if once I have my clutches on him you will never get him back! *Ach*, the precious love, there

he comes now! Quick, this second I must have him! There, something good, a ring for a young man's finger! What! Even so it is too big; and that salesman swore to me that he was a family-man of much experience! But anyhow, *Exzellenz*, you will let old stupid Aunt Bertha have a kiss?"

And rocking him in her arms, she sang for him softly in her golden voice an old French ballad, about a little marquis who went up from the château into the mountains with a popgun to shoot June-bugs. And while the little marquis was spying about, a cannon went "*boum!*" in the valley, and greatly frightened him. But just when he was wrinkling up his face to cry, there arrived from the château some pretty ladies in powdered hair and panniers, who gave him caramels.

Then she insisted on tracking down the scent of roasting turkey. The three Graces led her to the kitchen, where Arbutus was floating round amid the pots and saucepans.

"Oh, what a nice kitchen! Here I could be at home! Is it permitted to peek into the oven? *Gott im Himmel*, this is no turkey; it is an ostrich! I tell you all frankly, to-morrow night, back there in New York, I shall not be able to squeak a note as *Venus!* The smell of this bird is working up my appetite into a frenzy! And what is down those stairs?"

"An old dragon, named Ichthiogriffipotamus."

"Do we eat him, too?"

"After all these years that he's guarded the jelly-glasses and the potato-bin?"

"Ah, so, a member of the family! No, I am excited already, but not as yet a cannibal."

At five o'clock the feast was ready to be served. The girls had laid the table in the studio.

The walls of that room were festooned with crimson

leaves and pine-boughs studded with their cones. The table, decked with masses of chrysanthemums, disappeared beneath innumerable bowls of spiced fruit, preserves, condiments made from family recipes, and cranberry jelly molded in the shapes of pineapples and rabbits. On the delf platter, the twenty-five-pound turkey, browned to a turn, exalted its succulent breastbone. And to the fragrance of this noble fowl were added other aromas no less rich, as Arbutus, in a fresh calico gown and a bandana turban, her black visage shining, her white teeth visible from ear to ear, bore in an endless succession of vegetable-dishes. Bristles, forgetting the behavior to be expected of a British guest, jumped barking round this curiously dusky human creature, in whom he recognized a valuable friend. His tow-colored mustaches were lifted in a grin perhaps of flattery.

"We must find room on the table for all the fixings," cried Mr. Goodchild, "and pass them down the line. It's an old custom of the house, and not a bad one. For, as Epictetus says, 'When you eat, be of service to those who eat with you.'"

The light was growing dim above the window-boxes; John kindled the porcelain lamp, its milky shade embellished with hand-painted daisies, in the center of the table. The rays reached out to embrace the circle of faces, to bind them together with a tender radiance. And there fell a hush as the company reflected on the amiable work of Fate, which had threaded round this homely board as it were a rosary of hearts.

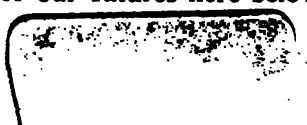
Then all at the same time, though not a sign was made, they felt that Mr. Goodchild would like to say grace. With one impulse they turned toward the head of the table, where he sat enthroned behind the turkey. His patriarchal beard shone silvery and golden; his high forehead, the dome that

had harbored so many varied thoughts, seemed encircled with a shadowy wreath. It was a prefiguration from the hand-painted daisies on the lamp-shade.

Clasping his slender hands together, closing his eyes, Aurelius pronounced these words:

"Our Heavenly Father, in obedience to the proclamation of Thy servant Woodrow Wilson, President of these United States, but also with a joyous alacrity on our own account, we are gathered here to thank Thee for Thy countless blessings, showered upon us during the past year. Nor can we confine our acknowledgment to these twelve months just gone; we owe to Thee a debt that has its origin in our earliest recollected days. For Thou, despite our many frailties and errors, hast sustained us patiently; Thou hast inspired us finally in all our quandaries; and, after sad hours, when we thought more of our grief than of Thy boundless pity, Thou hast ever afforded us Thy miraculous, sweet anodyne. And moreover, as if that were not enough, Thou hast continually reimbued us with an inexplicable, but certain, faith, that in Thy good time we shall be once more with those we miss to-day.

"We thank Thee for our present comfort and provisionment, highly sufficient for our needs. We thank Thee for the world which Thou hast spread before us, its sights, its sounds, its perfumes, its adornments by those whom Thou hast permitted to catch a fleeting glimpse of the eternal harmonies. We thank Thee for our own glimpses of that deathless beauty, which we have tried, and will try, to record in such a way that others may share the emotions which we have enjoyed. We thank Thee for love, which is here represented in every earthly form acceptable to Thee, the vibrations of which we hope may spread out from this room to touch, and somehow benefit, all that lives and breathes. We thank Thee, finally, for our futures here below, know-



ing well that Thou hast stored them up with treasures, in
implanting in our souls the secret of true happiness. For,
as Whittier says,

“The tissue of the life to be
We weave with colors all our own,
And in the field of Destiny
We reap as we have sown.

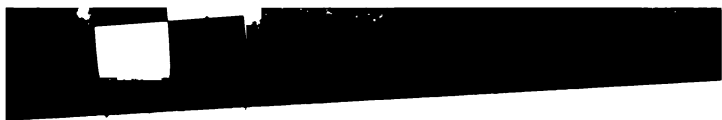
“Dear Lord, may the world seem as lovely to all Thy
children as it does to us on this day appointed for thanks-
giving. Amen.”

PROPERTY
OF THE
NEW YORK
SOCIETY LIBRARY


2
43











APR 22 1942

